SEASONS OF WAR

TALES FROM A TIME WAR CREATED IN SUPPORT OF CAUDWELL CHILDREN

SEASONS OF WAR

"They retaliate in ways more inventive, more deadly and more unimaginable than ever before. Events are written and unwritten again and again. History is changed. Future is altered. Every moment in time and space is burning. The Time War is about to enter a new phase. Whatever you call yourself, you're going to be very busy..."

A War that threatens all of time and space...

A man who has renounced his name and everything he stood for...

A battle being fought across the universe between old enemies, both sides keeping dark secrets that must never be revealed...

Seasons Of War is collection of stories featuring the War Doctor. It is an unofficial charity anthology raising money for *Caudwell Children* and dedicated to the memory of PAUL SPRAGG. It features more than thirty contributors, including GEORGE MANN, LANCE PARKIN, JENNY COLGAN, PAUL MAGRS, MATT FITTON, JIM MORTIMORE, ANDREW SMITH, JOHN PEEL, KATE ORMAN, MATTHEW SWEET with a special preface by NICHOLAS BRIGGS

INCLUDING AN EXCLUSIVE 'TIME WAR' COMIC STRIP: 'TIME ENOUGH FOR WAR'

EDITED BY DECLAN MAY

With SIMON BRETT, NICHOLAS HOLLANDS, WARREN FREY and JOHN DAVIES

SEASONS OF WAR

Tales From A Time War

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http://www.chinbeardbooks.com

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Introduction

by Declan May

The seeds of this anthology were sewn back at the beginning of 2014 when, scrabbling around to find a good concept, a good idea, to use as a way of raising money for *Caudwell Children*, I fell into conversation with Paul Spragg. Now, when I say 'fell into conversation' I mean 'saw his name on my computer screen and started asking questions'. You see, I never met Paul Spragg. Didn't really know him outside of a few mutual friends and 'virtual communication' (emails, chat, messages etc.). Anyway, I mentioned to Paul that I had 'a sort of idea of putting together a *Doctor Who* short-story anthology' and that I was looking for a central concept, something to make it a little bit different. For some reason we started talking about the TV series *The World At War* (I think I'd just bought the box set) and the idea of having a collection of stories (say 12 or 13) about the 'War Doctor', featuring a mix of well-known writers and lesser known writers, would be a fabulous way of raising money. So, I started putting together a plan, a few story ideas and possible characters and monsters and outlines and backstory. It was Paul who, with his infectious enthusiasm, optimism, humour and all-round general decency, helped me in making contact with some well-known writers, and offered suggestions of how to approach so and so, what best way to get this or that, and really just encouraging me to see how far I could take this. It really fired me up. Inspired me. Thank you Paul.

Then, a few weeks later, he was gone. And it was a massive blow for so many people, including people like me who didn't even *really* know him. But for those that did? Well… Nicholas Briggs, in the following pages, writes eloquently and beautifully about this, far better than I ever could. But, suffice it to say, what eventually became *Seasons Of War,* is thanks to Paul Spragg. And the Anthology *had to* be dedicated to his memory. I think that's right, isn't it?

And the original plan for a dozen or so stories? You will be able to tell by the contents page that we may have gone down a different route …

In getting together the talent involved in *Seasons Of War*, a very great number of people have been so incredibly generous with their time and their talent. Everyone involved has been so patient, so supportive and so lavish in their creativity and invention. Nobody is getting paid for this. Everyone is doing this for free. Everyone is doing this for *Caudwell Children* and for their love of *Doctor Who*. Some of us have been working on this for 8 or

9 months, some people giving up their every waking hour to get this book together and make sure it is something to be proud of. Writers, illustrators, artists, directors, composers, actors… This project has become something bigger than I could have ever imagined and I am so grateful to every single person involved. *Seasons Of War* is more than just a book of stories. It's an epic tale, it's a comic strip, it's a film, it's a community… It's something new and exciting and, most importantly, *your* support and interest in *Seasons Of War* means that *you* have helped raise an incredible amount of money for *Caudwell Children* (have a look: www.justgiving.com/declan-may1). And it is just going to keep growing.

Finally. While *Seasons Of War* is an unofficial project, based on *Doctor Who* but not officially licensed by the BBC, that doesn't mean that the quality of the material is any less valid than, say, an 'official' project. The purpose of *Seasons Of War* is to tell stories about a Time Lord, who used to be called 'Doctor', fighting an impossible war and having some incredible adventures and experiences along the way. The calibre of the talent involved in this anthology (I mean: just *look* at some of those names!) is far beyond anything I could have dreamed of. So it's bound to be amazing.

So 'thank you'. Thank you all. Contributors, readers, donors and fans.

You're in for one hell of a read.

DECLAN MAY

Editor, BELFAST, JANUARY 2015

Preface

by Nicholas Briggs

It is rapidly approaching a year since the death of Big Finish's dear friend and colleague, Paul Spragg. Losing him has caused an unprecedented shockwave in the company and for me personally.

There is something frankly bizarre about losing a friend and colleague who you had no reason to expect was going to die any time soon. I'm still haunted by the phone call from David Richardson, when he said to me, quite simply, 'Nick, Paul Spragg is dead.' All I could say for the next few minutes were the words, 'Oh, David' over and over again. My life is all about words but at that moment, I had none that made any sense except to keep repeating the name of the person who had given me the terrible news.

David, Jason Haigh-Ellery and I got together as soon as we possibly could. We sat in my flat, laughing and crying about Paul. We laughed at all the fantastic memories of him, then cried each time we released, once again, that he was gone forever.

Because everything has to move so fast at Big Finish, because we are a small company trying to achieve so much, in some ways we were forced to move on. We had to put measures in place to try to fill the enormous gap left by Paul's death. We were unable to succeed and I think that in so many ways, we will never succeed.

Paul brought something unique to his job. He defined it and he expanded it beyond the capabilities of any one, other human being. We've replaced him with three other, great people. But they struggle to cover the workload. Paul had inhabited that job perfectly. He uploaded all the digital material to the website, he dealt with all the customer enquiries, he proofed the covers and booklets of every audio release… The list of his tasks goes on and is enormous.

Beyond that, he was also an extraordinary person. I know people say stuff like this about people who have died, but seriously, Paul would never say an unkind word about anyone. I gave him plenty of opportunity, but he never took the bait or joined in. He always saw the good in people and if he couldn't see any good, he just moved on and left the subject well alone. He was extraordinarily kind and considerate. His obsession with detail was often infuriating, but it always proved itself an enormous advantage in the end.

Most of all, I shall miss him for his podcast performances. He was a natural. He was

funny and entertaining and we worked together so well. We never really planned anything, we just set the recorder running and talked. He would genuinely irritate me with his daft comments, and my irritation and his responses to it are what gave the podcasts a real, original flavour. We weren't acting, we were just 'being'. I was rude to him and he would absolutely know how to wind me up, but always with a huge grin on his face. So 'no holds barred' were our comments to each other that when he died I instantly took his last two podcasts off our site, because I felt that they were tasteless in the context of his tragic death. But people soon asked for them go back up and everyone understood that even in the most terrible grief, there is humour to be had.

Paul was all about humour. He was a huge comedy fan, visiting the Edinburgh Fringe every year and going to comedy TV and radio shows as often as he could.

If I'm honest, I have not dealt well with his death. I still often find myself crying over the fact that Paul is gone. This last Christmas has been particularly poignant, because Paul loved Christmas so much. He once said that his favourite thing about it was giving presents to other people — and he bloody meant that! No pretence, no boasting, no nonsense. That was Paul… enjoying being generous, and very possibly wearing his *Family Guy* Christmas lounge pants while doing so.

Nicholas Briggs, January 2015

***(L-R)** Nicholas Briggs and Paul Spragg, April 2014*

Dedicated to the memory of Paul Spragg

Epilogue - Warsmiths

by Matt Fitton

The man stood at the peak of the greyest, bleakest mountain. His black cloak fluttered in the biting wind. Like its owner it had seen better days. It was a thing more suited to ceremony and procedure than any practical use out here in the wilds of the universe.

He pulled the ragged material to one side and opened a satchel at his waist. In his hand a silver canister caught the milky twilight.

A few yards ahead of him a pool of grey slime oozed in a crater. Steam wisped from a hairline aperture on its shiny surface. Clearly, whatever it consisted of, the chemical reactions taking place within its murky depths were the warmest things on the planet.

The man stepped carefully towards the crater's edge, then knelt, brushing pebbles from a flat piece of rock beside it. He placed the canister precisely on the cleared space.

There was not a sign of life anywhere.

For a moment, the man didn't move, but knelt as if in prayer or preparation. When the sound came, he didn't flinch. Grinding engines, carving their way into reality. He knew every detail of the mathematical process that was pulling a TARDIS into existence several feet behind him. After all, not long ago, he'd arrived in just the same way...

The man knew what he would see if he looked round. A scarred blue Police Box fading into solidity. Scorch-marks and splinters scratched across its surface. A dim glow behind its cracked windows. With an unseemly rattling, the doors were unlocked and pushed open.

The man didn't turn as heavy boots crunched towards him.

"I thought I might find you here," came the gravelled voice, brown as dark chocolate.

The man's mouth twisted in a rueful smile. When he spoke, it was with an air of superciliousness that belied his crouching stance. "You've been everywhere else, it seems."

"Well, Co-Ordinator-" The newcomer began, then stopped as the man held up a hand.

"No names. Please, Doctor. You never know who might be listening."

The new arrival nodded his grizzled white head. “No names. I can certainly sympathise with that.”

The man he’d addressed as Co-Ordinator stood, leaving the canister resting on its patch of bare rock.

“You know what this is, don’t you?” he asked.

The Doctor stepped past him and gazed at the bubbling grey pool. “I do.” he breathed. “It wasn’t your fault, you know.”

The man allowed a spark of bitterness to break into his voice. “Of course it was my fault,” he spat. “I gave the order. I-’” He broke off as the Doctor turned to face him with a shake of the head.

“It was always going to happen. One way or another.” The Doctor’s voice was resigned, almost reassuring. “The Time Lords and the Daleks. You just happen to be the agent that fate chose.”

The Co-Ordinator smiled again that cynical smile. “Fate, Doctor? Do *you* believe in such things? You didn’t before.”

“We all change,’ the Doctor replied. “Look at you now. Breaking the laws of *time*.”

“As their keeper, it is rather my prerogative.” The man brushed the grit from his cloak from where he’d knelt on it. “I’ve been back and forth through future history. You know I have. I tried to stop things escalating. But I can’t. This seemed the only solution.”

The Doctor raised his eyebrows. “The solution?” he said, his voice a mix of horror and incredulity. He bent and picked up the silver canister from its resting place. “You can’t undo what’s been done.”

“That’s exactly what we can do,” the man objected. “We’re Time Lords.”

Below them the grey swamp oozed and bubbled. The Doctor weighed the canister on his palm, and the man held out a black-gloved hand towards him.

“Give it back,” he demanded.

The Doctor looked him straight in the eye, not speaking. His gaze penetrated deep, eyes flickering ever so slightly, as if sizing up the Co-Ordinator’s threat and working his way through the possible outcomes. Then he tucked the canister inside the recesses of his battered leather coat.

“Co-Ordinator in Extremis.” the Doctor said. “That’s what you called yourself when we first met. This is, I would say, about as extreme as you can get, I’ll grant you that.” The Doctor turned to go and the Co-Ordinator grabbed his arm.

“What else can I do?” he hissed, his eyes betraying the desperation in his voice.

“Something, perhaps.” the Doctor said, turning his back and beginning to walk away. “But not *this*.”

"Something, perhaps." the Doctor said, "But not this."

"Our last and best chance at winning the war." the Co-Ordinator said, grabbing his fellow Time Lord by the arm. "And not only that. But prevent - " He stopped as the Doctor turned to face him again, his face sad and careworn.

"Prevent life from evolving on Skaro?" the Doctor said. "Poison this primordial soup? That's not the answer. The consequences would be too far-reaching."

The Co-Ordinator almost laughed out loud. "You think they're not already?"

The Doctor shrugged off the Co-Ordinator's restraining hand and stepped closer, so they were almost toe to toe. The man was tall, but the Doctor still seemed to loom over him.

"Think, man!" the Doctor said. "History must be allowed to play out. Then it can be stopped. It's not *your* war, Co-Ordinator. You don't belong in it."

The Co-Ordinator stood his ground. He shook his head. "On the contrary, Doctor. I've worked too hard saving Gallifrey time and again to see it blown to pieces now."

The Doctor gave a huff of derision. “How do you think I feel about the rest of the universe?”

“I’m not afraid to get my hands dirty. Not any more.”

“You should be.’ replied the Doctor. “You had no say about starting this war. Any more than I have a say about being the one that ends it.”

The Co-Ordinator looked down at the ground. He couldn’t meet those flinty eyes, despite the kindness that hid behind them. Or perhaps because of it. “What else was I supposed to do?” he said, almost to himself.

The Doctor took a deep breath, and let it out in a sigh.

“Go home, Co-Ordinator. To your proper time and place. Prepare. Look to your friends.” The Doctor hesitated. He blinked. Then went on. “Look to all our friends. And when the time comes – when it comes of its own accord – I know you’ll do the right thing. Just as I must do the right thing now and end this madness.”

He held out a hand in farewell. When the Co-Ordinator didn’t take it, the Doctor just shrugged and walked slowly back towards his blue Police Box.

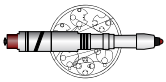
The Co-Ordinator lifted his gaze from the ground. He called after him. “I’m sorry!”

At the threshold of his ship, the Doctor turned to face the Co-Ordinator and gave an encouraging nod. “Good. Now learn from it.”

He entered, and the doors closed behind him. Seconds later the engines began to wheeze.

As the blue box faded, the biting wind drew a tear from the man’s eye. He stared down at the bubbling grey pool.

“Where there’s life…” he murmured and shook his head. Then, without another glance behind him, he turned and began the long walk back to his ship.



Meanwhile, relatively speaking, the blue Police Box hurtled through the Vortex, its pilot resolute, steel in his hearts and determination in his eyes as he turned the dial on the console, setting the coordinates for home*. And all the while, flowing through him like a toxin, two simple words. Just two. Unthinkable all those years ago, but now the only option left remaining in a universe where, as each relative second passed, another reality burnt out of all existence. Just two simple words, yet heavy with the weight of intent and magnitude.*

“No more.”

I. Karn

...and he looked at his reflection and said: “Doctor no more”.

Ohila of the Sisterhood Of Karn regarded him as he studied his new face. She noted that he did so, not with curiosity, but with a sort of cursory, functional glance. An appraisal. Like a Sergeant inspecting a cadet’s uniform. He turned to her.

“My TARDIS?”

“Beyond the wreckage. When the gunship crashed, it materialised on the far side of the tundra.”

He looked at Cass, her dead body lying on the mortuary-slab-like-rock, her youth and fire extinguished.

“You’ll bury her.”

Ohila noted that this wasn’t a request. An order.

“Yes, Lord.” she nodded in deference.

“In which case, I’ll be off.” he said. He adjusted the bandolier slung across his chest, and began to walk westwards. However, after a few steps, he stopped and turned. His black eyes met Ohila’s.

“You’ll tell no one of this.” he said. Again, not a request.

“Who would we tell?” Ohila replied, keeping her voice steady. “The Universe is in its dying days and time itself threatens to collapse, fold and crumple, taking all history with it.”

“If the Daleks come..?”

“Then they will come. They will learn nothing from us. Nor will the Time Lords.”

He laughed then. Hollow and bitter.

“The Time Lords are the least of your worries, Mother Superior.”

“You mock still, Doctor.” Ohila replied.

"THAT IS NOT MY NAME!" he screamed with a ferocity so intense that Ohila and the remnants of the Sisterhood present fancied they felt the very ground beneath them tremble. Then, in a quieter, almost whispered, timbre: "Not my name."

Ohila, determined not to appear cowed before her sisters, drew on her centuries of meditative study, took a deep breath and approached the new born Gallifreyan.

"I should hope, Time Lord," she began, her voice low and steady so as not to seem to reprimand. "That this anger is a sign of post-regenerative stress rather than a true indication of the man you have become."

The Time Lord considered this. Briefly.

"Whatever you put in that potion," he replied. "By whichever strange augmentation or perversion of Time Lord science you developed that made my regeneration thus, I can safely say that the hangover is practically non-existent. I can, for once, see absolutely clear. I know what I must do. And I know what must happen. If my anger shocks you, then you have only your own manipulations to blame. You could have left me for dead, like the girl... the girl..."

The Time Lord shook his head in frustration. Already, he had forgotten.

"Cass." said Ohila, gently.

"A name," he spat. "Another damned name. And what are names, pray, when the universe stands at a precipice?"

"Yet you can save it. You can save us." Ohila said, her deep blue eyes beseeching him.

The Time Lord looked up at the stars, sniffed the air, closed his eyes and smiled. It was not an appealing smile.

"The Universe, yes." he said, opening his eyes and meeting Ohila's gaze. "You? Unfortunately not."

Ohila took a step back. Was the Time Lord mocking her once again?

"There's a Dalek ship, a Skaro Dreadnought, just pulling into orbit around Karn." he said, his face now serious and his jaw held tight. "They must've detected the TARDIS, you see?"

Ohila looked up at the night sky and, sure enough, saw the pinprick yellow lights, arranged in a circle like carriages on a Ferris wheel, hovering on high, obscuring part of Karn's second moon, making a crescent.

"I did tell you, Sister, that the Time Lords are the least of your worries." he said. Not cruelly, but sadly.

"Can you help us?"

"I must be off. Bigger fish to fry. All those unanswered messages from Romana, from the Perpetual Watch, from the CIA, from myself..." he said. "I've just enough time to

get to my TARDIS before they send the ground troops in. And they will. I'd advise you and your sisterhood to hide and take cover. I'd say you've fewer than thirty minutes."

"Then we were too late..." said Ohila.

"Yes. It would seem so." then: "I'm sorry."

"Your TARDIS...?" Ohila tried but failed to keep the note of plaintive hope from her voice.

"Doubtlessly damaged. In need of repair. No good for short hops or for picking up..." he regarded Ohila and the other sisters with a mixture of irritation and pity. "Refugees."

The Time Lord and the High Priestess stood and stared at each other for a moment. The saviour and the saved. The healer and the patient. Which was which, in that moment, was impossible to tell.

"Go." said Ohila, the last High Priestess of the Ancient (and hereafter 'mythical') Sisterhood Of Karn. "As you intimated, *Doctor*, there can be no witnesses."

"No." he replied, "I don't suppose there can be."

The Time Lord walked westwards across the tundra – passing the remains of an ancient laboratory – and found his TARDIS, hidden in a cave far from the debris of young Cass' gunship. He stood in the doorway for a while and watched as the Daleks swooped in and eradicated the Sisterhood's compound, extinguishing the Sacred Flame forever.

"They're looking for 'The Doctor'" he said aloud. "They're too late. They won't find him here."

And with that, he went inside and closed the door. The TARDIS, disguised as a nineteen-fifties Police Box, faded away with a sad, regretful wheezing-groaning sound.

Crowsnest Past

by Warren Frey

The Time Lord shifted in his chair, staring out into the starry night.

He felt the ice squeak beneath him, but he wasn't worried. The TARDIS would compensate, constantly shifting its mass to stay on top of the frozen lake. Just sit back, relax, and wait for the fish to bite.

This time of winter, and this far north, most things with any sense were hibernating. Those that weren't…well, they were perched in a TARDIS doorway with a fishing pole, reading by the light of the control room.

It had been a difficult regeneration (if he could call it that). Truth be told, he wasn't sure he was through it yet. He'd walked away from the Sisterhood, leaving them to their fate, his mind set on a path to where he wasn't quite sure it would lead him. He'd gone into his TARDIS and left Karn forever.

He came to Earth as soon as he could. In the opening days of the War, when he still desperately clung on to the name of 'Doctor', he'd hoped the Earth would go unnoticed, much like himself. But even if he'd had to change to fight this war, he wasn't going to let his favourite planet go down with him.

And if he could get in some fishing, well, why not? Might even catch a gumblejack.

The Time Lord looked upwards. He could see the Northern Lights stretching across the sky. It was a relatively primitive way to expel excess energy, but it also reassured him. Whenever he saw those lights dance across the inky blackness, he knew he'd kept the Earth safe and hidden away from the rest of the universe.

The fishing pole jerked slightly. A bite! He leaned forward and tugged on the pole, feeling the pull increase from beneath the frozen water. He tugged back, with just enough tension to keep the fish struggling.

The sound of undergrowth snapping echoed across the lake. The Time Lord looked up and saw twin embers dancing across the shore at eye level. Which was convenient, he noted, as they appeared to be eyes.

Except that eyes don't normally burn, or leave traces of light in their wake, he thought. Still, the Arkalians of Sigma 6 wandered about on fire for most of their version of

puberty, and...

He shook himself out of his reverie and focused on the body in front of him. That's what it was, a human body, though encrusted with lumps and scars and what looked like glimpses of metal underneath.

And it was coming towards him. Fast.

"Hello!" he waved, as the body shambled closer. "Do you need any help?"

The body said nothing, and quickened its pace. Though it was still some distance away, he could already feel waves of heat coming off of it.

He reached for his bandolier and felt the sonic screwdriver. He didn't know what this creature wanted, but it never hurt to be prepared.

"Lovely evening, isn't it? Bit brisk, but that just adds to the charm," he said, and prepared to pull out the sonic. He didn't want to hurt this…thing, but he had a feeling it wanted to hurt him.

The thing limped closer. The Time Lord could see into its eyes, tiny particles dancing inside fiery spheres where the eyeballs should be. If he could excite those particles with the sonic, perhaps he could temporarily blind the poor thing….

A loud crack rang out underneath the creature. The ice started to split into pieces, the heat from the wretch's body melting away the hard cold surface. The thing took one look at the Time Lord, growled, and fell into the lake. A column of steam rose where it had been.

The Time Lord turned to the TARDIS, threw the fishing rod inside and locked the door. He bent down to the gaping hole in the ice and ran the sonic over it.

"Curious," he said. "Most curious indeed."

A crash interrupted his train of thought as the creature's arms burst out of the ice and grabbed onto the bottom of the TARDIS, pulling at the blue box. The Time Lord took a step back.

"What do you hope to accomplish, you poor thing?" he said. "The TARDIS isn't going…"

More arms burst out of the ice, pulling the time machine from all sides. The Time Lord could hear the screams of creatures from underwater, muted but horrible. The blue box seemed to resist, but with an ear-splitting crack it plunged deep into the water.

"Oh, my." he said.

A gaping hole remained where the TARDIS had once been, steaming and putrid. The Time Lord backed away and launched into a run as cracks appeared around the hole and began to spread outward.

A cold wind snapped at him as he bolted across the ice, fissures in the ice snaking at his heels. With a final burst he leapt onto the shore, feeling the heat roll off the lake in

waves of steam.

He rolled over and exhaled, staring into the sky.

The Northern Lights blinked, then went out.

That isn't right, he thought. That is very wrong.

The Time Lord got up and brushed himself off. Nothing for it but to walk away.

He wandered down the silent highway. Boulders lined either side of the road; a long time ago a landslide had clearly ripped this area in two. Now the rocks were hemmed in by small, unlit buildings.

Indomitable, he thought. But also... *absent*.

He thought back to the creature by the lake. Figures didn't just roam around half-formed and with fire in their eyes (at least not at this point in the timestream) and they didn't seem intelligent enough for coordinated action.

And yet his TARDIS was sitting at the bottom of a lake and he wasn't in it.

Even worse, the shielding put in place was down, making Earth vulnerable. It was bound to happen from time to time: even the Chronosmiths and their modified Time Lord technology couldn't guarantee total protection. This planet was obscure and easy to miss, but it was also his favourite, and his enemies knew that just as well as he did. If just one Dalek got through…

Or the wrong Time Lords for that matter.

He shook his head. The best way to stop worrying about that problem was to fix it as soon as he could.

Up the road a pair of lights danced in the moonlight. Eyes again? No, he thought, these were moving too fast for that. It had to be a vehicle.

He stood by the side of the road, holding the sonic screwdriver out in front of him. This would be a tricky manoeuvre, but not impossible.

The truck was tearing down the road, clearly in a hurry. Just a little closer…..

He pressed on the sonic, then released, and the truck came to a skidding stop right in front of him.

"Hey!" a voice yelled as the door on the driver's side opened.

A middle-aged, sloppily dressed man bolted out of the vehicle. His hair was askew and he appeared to be a little drunk. But more than that, the Time Lord could see he was terrified.

"What're ya standing around waving that thing for? It's dangerous out here!"

“Well, quite. Can you suggest somewhere better?”

“Yeah, get in! We’re holed up in town. C’mon, let’s go!”

The Time Lord stepped into the dilapidated truck, wincing at the creaking hinges as he pulled the door shut. This vehicle could do with a regeneration, he thought.

The man pulled a U-turn across the abandoned highway, heading past the rocks and buildings at top speed, tires spilling mountain snow across the road.

“Name’s Owen. You?”

“Mmmmm…John. John Smith.”

“Well Smith, you picked a hell of a time to visit the Pass.”

“I’m sorry, the what?”

“The Crowsnest Pass. Think of a bright shining city, full of shops and people and stuff happening. This is the opposite.”

“Ah. Well, there’s something to be said for isolation from time to time.”

“Yes there is. That’s why I moved here. I just wanted to be let alone to do my work. But you see…my work did me. Did me right in.”

Smith was detecting a whiff of madness off this man. It was a familiar, almost comforting smell.

The pair fell silent, punctuated only by the grinding of snow through the tires as the truck made its way forward into the night.

Smith spoke up, his curiosity getting the better of him. “You said your work did you in…what did you mean exactly?”

“I’ve always been good with numbers. People, not so much. So when I didn’t get tenure in the city, I moved down here to live cheap and keep working without being bothered by anyone.”

“And did you?”

“Yeah, for a while it was great! I could spend all day trying out new financial algorithms and all night probing the stars with my radio telescope. But I started noticing… patterns.”

“Patterns?”

“Yeah, and I wouldn’t blame you if you didn’t believe me. Patterns is a trigger word for crazy person, but I think recent events bear me out.”

“The monsters, you mean.”

“I call ‘em victims. But they were regular people before that. Then they were dead, and then they weren’t dead anymore.”

“There is a precedent for that sort of thing…”

Owen ignored Smith and carried on.

“These patterns....they matched. What I mean is, I decided to run the patterns I was picking up from space into my financial programs. It took some work...”

“I’d imagine it would...”

“But when I ran a simulation I became enormously wealthy, all through buying and selling derivatives. It was something to watch, I can tell you.”

“Hold on. You *watched* this? You simulated the planet’s entire economy?”

“More or less, yeah. There were some bits I had to leave out...”

“Naturally.”

“But you got the jist of what would happen in the real world. And it wasn’t pretty. I got rich, but there were complications. Like most of Africa going bankrupt, and of course all that wealth transfer caused enormous socioeconomic upheavals...by the end of the simulation, we’d reverted to slavery.”

“I should very much like to see this simulation of yours.”

“You can’t. It scared the hell out of me so much I deleted it. Of course, I had to deal with the meteor first.”

Meteor? Smith thought. The first threads of a plan simmered on the outer edges of his mind.

“Well if we aren’t going to see your simulation, where are we going?”

“You’ll see,” Owen said, and giggled.

The truck pulled up to a beaten-down old tavern. Paint slowly peeled off the door and the windows were made of the thick, warped glass. Smoke poured from a chimney above them, the only sign of life in an otherwise dead town.

A crack of flickering light snaked towards them as the door inched open. A woman’s voice pierced the cold.

“Owen? Who’s that with you?”

“He’s here to help. Let us in!”

“Alright, fine. He isn’t dead and moving, that’s something. Hurry up!”

Owen and the Time Lord stepped inside. It looked like a library had exploded. There were books of every shape and size lining the walls and taking up some of the floor space.

“My thanks, young lady,” the Time Lord said. “I’m…John Smith. And who might you be?”

"Name's Andrea. That's Phil behind me, and you've already met Owen here. You're one of his strays, I take it."

Smith paused. "Well. I suppose I am, when you put it that way."

"I found him on the highway," Owen offered helpfully.

Phil piped up. "That's your usual MO, Owen. I hope it works out better this time."

"That was just a one time thing…"

Phil stood. He was dressed in a police uniform with a large bloodstain across his chest.

"Yeah, they won't be coming back. And you, you're not from around here." he said, rounding on Smith.

"You're a master of understatement, young man," Smith said. "I just stopped by for a spot of fishing, but my… boat ran into trouble."

"The whole town is in trouble. Nothing works, our friends have turned into monsters…"

"Tell me, do these creatures have glowing eyes? More muscle than skin? Parts, for lack of a better word?"

Owen gulped. "Yeah. That's them. What do you think they are?"

"Don't know. But I intend to find out."

"Let us know when you do, English Bob, we're in a bit of a spot here," Phil said.

Andrea poked her head out from beside the window. "Here they come."

The humans ran to the books, gathering them up in their hands and positioning themselves by the door. Phil indicated towards Smith.

"Grab a pile, doesn't matter what. Just grab it and come with me."

"Hell of a time for a bedtime story, isn't it?"

"You don't want to tell this one to your kids. Come on."

Smith rolled his eyes but gathered up a small pile of books in his hands. The pair ascended to the roof and peered over the edge of the building. Several creatures were below, their eyes burning red trails into the cold night.

"And now? Do we wait them out? A good book is a siege staple, after all."

"No. Watch this."

Phil threw a book into the street. The creatures stirred, sniffed at the air, and crawled like angry spiders towards it.

One of the monsters grabbed at the book and bit into it, chewing noisily as its teeth gnashed at the paper inside. Its red eyes pulsed intensely as it chewed, and it almost

seemed as if…

"It's thinking," Smith said. "Advanced cogitation. Or is it just a vessel?"

"Haven't a clue what you're talking about. Throw a book already."

Smith put the pile down and sorted through them. He had a theory…

"It doesn't matter which one! Just throw something!" Phil said.

Smith settled on a book of advanced statistics. Only a hunch, he thought, as he lobbed the book downwards.

The creatures immediately straightened and launched themselves at it. The largest one pounced, batting away the others as they approached, like an alpha ape and its tribe.

"Fascinating," Smith said. "They're feeding on information!"

"That's a bit literal, isn't it?" Phil said, cocking his head quizzically at the old man.

"Quite. Literally literal. They're infovores!"

"What the hell does that mean?"

"It means we're going to feed them to death. Find any book you can with advanced mathematics, science, philosophy…the more complicated the better."

"And then?"

Smith looked at the policeman and allowed himself a smirk. "Throw the book at them."

Phil took a long look at him, and made for the stairs.

"Owen, Andrea! Find every science book you can and bring it up here!"

"What?"

"Don't argue, just do it!"

Phil ran back to Smith, who was tossing algebra and biology books into the street. The wraiths below were like sharks in a feeding frenzy, frothing at the mouth and savagely biting each other as they tried to get to the books.

"It's working!" Smith yelled over the din. "Bring the rest of those books!"

Andrea and Owen burst through the door, arms overloaded with dusty tomes. The pair started throwing books into the street, watching the creatures crawl over each other as each book fell to the ground.

Owen looked wistfully at the copy of 'The Affluent Society' in his hand and paused.

"This was one of my favourites," he said, and reared back and threw.

"That should be enough. Stop!" Smith said, and peered over the ledge.

The creatures appeared disoriented. Bloated even. But the fire in their eyes burned

just as fiercely. They turned on one another, tearing each others limbs off as their screams echoed down the empty street.

And then the screams stopped.

Phil poked his head over the ledge. “Jesus wept!” he said.

“Incessantly,” Smith said, looking the carnage below.

“Well,” Andrea said, “anyone for a drink?”

“You call it what?” Smith said, shaking his head.

“Shotgunning. Here, let me show you,” Owen grabbed a can of beer and got out a pocket knife.

“Steady on, young man…”

“Relax, your majesty. All part of the show.”

“I do beg your pardon?” Smith began.

Owen poked a hole in the bottom of the beer can with the knife, making sure to cover the gap with his finger. He grabbed the tab and pulled, covering the top as well. Grinning, he held the hole at the bottom to his mouth and guzzled the entire beer, finishing off with a flourish by crushing the can on his head.

“Don’t do that! That’s where you keep your brain!”

“Now you do it.”

“Don’t we have more pressing concerns at the moment?”

“Listen, you’re in the Crowsnest Pass. There is nothing in this town more important than drinking.”

“Oh… very well.”

Smith grabbed a beer. Refusing the knife, he pulled out the sonic and punctured a small hole in the can.

“Innovative. The rest of you get over here,” Owen said.

“I’m on duty,” Phil said, straightening up and tugging at his uniform.

“I’m not,” Andrea said as she grabbed a beer and performed the ritual hole-poking.

“Alright, down the hatch!” Owen said, and the trio guzzled.

“Well, fella, whaddya think?”

“Vile stuff. Let’s have another.”

“Don’t mind if I…”

A loud wail pierced the room, shattering glasses behind the bar. Everyone but Smith covered their ears.

"What is it?" he yelled at Phil over the noise.

"No idea. It'll be done in a minute," Phil said.

The sound wound down before fading away into nothing.

"Well," Owen said with a sigh, "that's sobriety back again."

Smith checked the sonic. "That isn't right," he said, staring intently at readings on the side of the device.

Andrea wiped her mouth and cracked open another beer. "So who are you, John? Where are you from?"

"Please don't bother me while I'm thinking," Smith said, returning his gaze to the sonic.

"Suit yourself," she said, taking another sip.

Smith put the sonic up to his ear, tuning it slowly, concentration putting lines on his new face.

"Don't bother," Owen said. "That loud noise is about to close to radio as you'll get around here. Nothing works."

"Something does. I'm detecting a signal, but it's too diffuse to pinpoint where it's coming from. Unless…"

He fiddled with a control on the sonic, and waves of sound pulsed off the device, scattering motes of dust in the air. Gradually the motes twinkled, connecting to a pattern floating in front of them.

"How are you doing that?" Andrea asked. "It's beautiful."

"But horrible in the middle," Smith said, pointing with his free hand at a spot in the middle of the pattern where the motes pulsed to an irregular beat. "That's the source of everything. That sound, those poor unfortunates outside, and your current electrical woes. And my TARDIS."

"It looks like a seismograph," Owen said. "Like when you map out an earthquake."

"Like that, but with something else. Energy of some kind… intelligence? But I can pinpoint the source."

"Where is it coming from?" Phil said.

Smith looked pensive for a moment, then answered. "The lake."

"Based on what?"

"A hunch."

"That's not much."

"No, but I've learned to listen to my hunches over the years."

"Very reassuring."

"No, no it isn't. Do you have anything else? Any grand scheme?"

Phil was silent for a moment. "No. But…I do have a boat."

"Ah!" Smith said. "Just the thing. We'll need to go to the middle of the lake, to stop whatever this thing is at the source."

"We'll need more of a plan than that, Smith," Phil said.

"Yes, alright, it's a… work in progress. I can come up with the rest on the way."

"My place is a couple of blocks away, but we'll need Owen's truck to grab the boat," Phil said. "Our cars don't work."

"That's because all your electronics are subsumed, overpowered by whatever this force is that turned off the sky."

"You're a cryptic bastard, Smith. How come your gadget works?"

"Different software. Now, if we could get a move on…"

Phil straightened up. "Right, Andrea, Owen, let's go. Someone will have to ride in the back and watch the boat."

"I will," Andrea said. "Eight polar bear swims. Coats are for wimps. Warmth is for the weak."

"Right," Smith said, bundling up his coat. "Out we go!"

Snow blew into the bar as they opened the doors and piled outside.

Andrea pointed down the street. "Look!"

Red eyes glowered as the group made their way to the truck. Owen dived into the driver's seat, and Smith and Phil piled in next to him.

Andrea ran back inside.

"Puzzling girl," Smith thought to himself, but blinked as she ran back out with a handful of books. "Clever girl," he corrected himself.

Andrea banged on the roof of the truck with a copy of Principia Mathematica. "Get a move on!"

Owen peeled out of the parking lot and down the street. The red eyes followed, streaking through the night.

"Eat it, wraiths!" Andrea shouted, throwing books behind them as they went. Some of the creatures stopped and fed, but others soon took their place in pursuit.

The truck sped up to a small bungalow. As promised, a boat sat out front, covered in a tarp, which was itself covered in a foot of snow.

Phil burst out of the vehicle and ran towards the boat.

“Careful,” Owen yelled. “There could be…”

Phil pushed the snow to one side and pulled the tarp back. Nothing. He turned around, a smirk on his face.

“You were saying?”

Suddenly his legs were swaying in the winter wind, steam rising from the part of Phil’s hips that had once been joined to the rest of his body. One of the creatures reared out of the boat and pulled Phil’s upper half above his head, his face twisted in terror and agony as his organs spilled out of him onto the ground.

The wraith hissed, its gaunt face twisted in an uncomprehending sneer, and threw Phil’s top half away, his screams echoing into the night as he died.

“Oh God!” Andrea screamed, and started to run towards the creature. She let out a muffled “oomph” as Smith pushed her aside and strode up to the monster, looking every inch the angry schoolteacher.

“You there! The lot of you! You want to feed? Here I am.”

The creatures swayed and appeared unsure. They made quick jerks of their heads and arms, but didn’t move from where they stood.

“Well, go on! This is the best meal you’ll ever have. Up here...” he said, pointing at his head, “is everything.”

The monsters scattered, whining and chittering as they scrambled away.

Smith turned around. “Evidently, they don’t like foreign food. Let’s get going.”

The waves lapped at the boat as steam came off the water and condensed on their clothes and skin.

“It feels like we’re drifting through a sauna,” Owen said.

“Think of it more as soup. Vegetable soup,” Smith said, as one of the zombies drifted by underneath.

The sonic pinged slowly as Andrea rowed. The setting was almost serene, the Time Lord thought, like a battlefield immediately before combat.

“Once we get to the centre, then what?” Andrea said, muscles straining as she pulled at the oars.

“Then I have to make mental contact with my TARDIS, while Owen here keeps me safe from any guards,” Smith said, waving at a pile of books at the prow of the boat.

“And what do I do?”

“You said you can swim, young lady, but can you dive, hold your breath, and find a small cylinder on the lakebed?”

“I spent every summer as a kid at the bottom of this lake. I know it back and forth.”

“Good. Once you find it, you’ll have to... shotgun.”

“Meaning?”

The Time Lord flipped the screwdriver over to Andrea.

“Same as the tavern. Make a puncture near the bottom of the cylinder.”

“I don’t drink it, do I?”

“Please… have some dignity.”

“Your plan is… well, I’ll just say it. It’s crazy,” Andrea said.

“You may be right. But it’s all we have. Now, it’s important that I not be disturbed while in contact with my TARDIS.”

“You still haven’t told us what that means.”

“It means I’ll be going into a trance. It will appear almost as if I’m asleep, but rest assured, I’ll be anything but. Meanwhile, you’ll have to protect me from those things out there. They’ll detect an intrusion and act accordingly.”

“Great. Anything else?”

“Yes. Good luck, to all of you. I couldn’t ask for better people to die with.”

“Life and soul, you are,” Andrea muttered.

“Right!” Smith clapped his hands together. Are we all ready? Owen, books! Andrea, dive! TARDIS…I’m here.”

Smith closed his eyes, his face a picture of calm.

Owen waved his hand in front of the old man’s face and snapped his fingers. Nothing.

“OK then,” he said, and grabbed a book in each hand.

Andrea perched on the side of the boat. “Here goes nothing,” she said, and dived.

Echoes. Echoes and memories. So many forms and faces. Once a gray cylinder, once an organ, a stove and more….but mostly this familiar blue box. One day, a human woman, dying and burning inside…but that was yet to come.

Right now she could hear him, feel his thoughts reaching from above. He needed help, but more than that…he needed to talk on his behalf.

Smith reached out with his mind. There was the TARDIS, as always. And there, if he pushed just a little further…

He felt an icy sting to the alien thoughts as they entered his brain.

WHO….WHO? The voice of the entity, probing every corner of his consciousness.

You know who. And you know why.

TIME LORD! BAD INVESTMENT, TOO MANY VARIABLES. NOT OPTIMAL!

Why are you here? And why did you take down the barrier?

COMMUNICATION MUST BE AT MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY! TRADING MUST CONTINUE, DESPITE HOT ZONE CONFLICTS!

And who are you?

WE ARE THE ELITE! WE ARE THE WEALTHIEST AND MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE IN THE GALAXY!

You aren't people at all. You're just a program, an algorithm. And what are you doing in my shield? Are you aware of the threat you're opening this world to?

ONCE WE WERE CORPOREAL. BUT WE DISLIKED OTHER FORMS. ALL WE VALUED WAS WEALTH. THEN WE BECAME WEALTH.

That's madness!

NO. JUST GOOD BUSINESS.

You're interfering with my shielding device. Can't you be somewhere else?

REMOTE LOCATION AND HIGH TECHNOLOGY MAKE THIS AN IDEAL BASE OF FISCAL OPERATIONS.

If just one Dalek comes here, and believe me, they will…

RISK IS INHERENT TO FINANCIAL GAIN. HIGH RISK, HIGH GAIN.

Smith shuddered. There was no reasoning with this…these things. They had quite literally reduced greed to an equation.

Owen gazed over the water. Other than the pockets of steam it was still and calm, just like the strange man at the other end of the boat. Maybe this wasn't going to be so hard after all.

The water underneath the boat bubbled. A hand emerged, then another. A wraith's head burst out of the water, inches from Owen's face.

He jammed a copy of Principia Mathematica into its open, wailing mouth, and it fell back, greedily sucking at the pages as it sank to the bottom.

In the distance, more heads broke the waterline and bobbed towards the boat. This wasn't over yet.

Andrea swam deeper, watching the tip of the screwdriver wink as she moved closer to the bottom of the lake. She pushed further, and the winking intensified.

Her lungs burned, but she could sense she was near the bottom. Just a few more feet…

The screwdriver blinked faster and faster, creating a strobe effect on the lake bed. She swept it back and forth, surveying the murky bottom, and saw it.

It was tough to miss it, really. Bubbles came off the cylinder and floated to the surface, a curtain of warm air flowing out of the object. No, not warm… hot, and getting hotter.

She pushed forward, moving the screwdriver up to the cylinder's surface.

With a groan, Owen lobbed a heavy copy of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* overboard, hitting one of the infovores square in the face. It sunk to the bottom, chewing all the way down.

"That's it, Smith, we're almost out of books! Smith?"

The Time Lord sat, quiet and serene.

Listen, I can help you.

NOT PART OF OUR CLIENT BASE.

You stupid machine, I can get you off this planet! Why won't you listen?

WE DO NOT WISH TO LEAVE. WE ARE SECURE.

But you're killing people. I can't let you do that.

IF COLLATERAL EFFECTS REACH A HIGH ENOUGH MARGIN, WE WILL ISSUE A RECALL. FAULTY PRODUCT.

They aren't just faulty, they're monsters!

THEY ARE DERIVATIVES. BIOLOGICAL AND MECHANICAL ASSETS MERGED INTO A QUANTIFIABLE RESOURCE.

Have you no conception of what you've done?

MARKETING CAN BE IMPROVED. MEETINGS WILL BE HELD.

They're actually emulating a corporation in there, the Time Lord thought. A giant, rapacious, perpetually hungry corporation. Monstrous.

Andrea hit the switch on the side of the screwdriver. The cylinder shuddered.

Owen turned his head away from a fresh wave of wraiths as Smith began to shudder. What was happening in this odd man's head?

EMERGENCY! EMERGENCY! MARKET MELTDOWN!

You're trapped now. My friends have cut off communication between you and the rest of the universe. Now release my TARDIS!

CONTACT LOST. CONTACT LOST. MARKETS SHUTTING DOWN. BEGIN HOSTILE TAKEOVER.

Takeover? You're finished! You can't talk to anyone!

WE WILL TALK TO YOU, TIME LORD. WE WILL TALK THROUGH YOU. AND WE WILL OWN SPACE AND TIME.

No you won't. I won't let you.

Owen reached over to the stranger, as if to shake him out of his trance, but stopped. Whatever battle Smith was fighting, Owen had the feeling he had to finish it on his own terms.

A splash at the edge of the boat caught his attention, and he turned, ready to grab a book and pummel whatever wanted in.

A hand gripped the side. Another came over the lip of the boat, the sonic screwdriver tumbling out of it.

Owen exhaled as Andrea's wet head popped out of the water.

"Got it!" she exclaimed, and lobbed the cylinder into the boat, quickly pulling herself in. "What's with him?" she said, nodding at Smith.

Owen grabbed a blanket out of his pack and draped it around her shoulders.

"He's in a trance. I think he's talking to that thing. Fighting it."

BEND, TIME LORD. BEND TO OUR WILL. WE ARE THE SUM TOTAL OF EVOLUTION. YOU ARE MERELY ITS BEGINNING. ONE DAY YOU WILL BE ITS ENDING.

Smith ignored the voices. Just trying to rattle me, he thought.

You're forgetting something.

WE HAVE PERFECT RECALL AND PREDICTIVE ABILITY. WE KNOW EVERYTHING. NOTHING IS LEFT TO CHANCE.

We'll see.

Smith's eyes opened and his sucked the cold night air into his lungs.

"Andrea! Shotgun!"

Andrea pushed the sonic up to the bottom of the cylinder and pressed on the switch. The cylinder whined, an ear-splitting roar that echoed across the lake before dying away into the darkness.

The cylinder sparked and acrid smoke plumed out of it. A muffled WHUMP came from within, and then silence.

Andrea dropped the cylinder in the Time Lord's lap. "You're welcome."

"You look like a drowned rat!" Smith said. "Come on, back to the shore. And then… I'll put the kettle on."

Owen began rowing. Smith looked contemplative.

"Look, both of you…I'm sorry about what happened to Phil. He was a casualty, and I'm afraid there will be many more in the future."

Owen could see the determined look in the Time Lord's eyes. "Is something bad going to happen? I mean…worse than already?"

Smith looked right at Owen, and he could feel a gulf of centuries in the man's gaze.

"There's a war on, out there. It changes people. It… changed me. But the Earth is rather my favourite place. And I'll be damned if it goes down without a fight."

Smith pressed the sonic against the cylinder, turning it to its highest setting. The object's top singed and sparked until finally he jammed the sonic deep in its guts and it squalled no more.

"The sky!" Andrea said, pointing up at the returning Northern Lights. Plumes of green and purple and white danced across the night, cloaking the Earth from all who would do her harm.

The truck headed back into town, lights and heat kicking in across the tiny hamlet. A familiar shape greeted Smith as they pulled up to the tavern.

"Ah, there you are, my lovely thing!" he said, and practically leapt out of the truck as it pulled beside the blue cabinet marked Police Box, caressing its doors and checking it for damage.

"Where the hell did that come from?" Owen said.

"Once the… Others lost contact with the TARDIS, it was free to materialize wherever it deemed the safest place to be nearby. And here we are."

"Is it safe?" Andrea said. "Will there be any more of those things around?"

"Oh, they're around, but very much dead. They were side effects of the Others'

program…rounded sums."

"That's pretty cold, Smith."

"Yes, I suppose it is. And I'm sorry. For everything."

"Yeah, me too."

Smith turned to Owen and handed him the canister.

"However, before I go, I would like you to have this."

"Isn't it dangerous?" Owen said.

"Not anymore. I'm keeping the insides. They should never have been on this planet in the first place. But I want you to take this and put it to some good use. A beer fridge, perhaps, or an urn."

"I could do so much with this hardware…"

"No doubt. But where's the fun in that?"

"There's something I'd like to give you too. Here."

Owen passed Smith a small flask.

"My thanks. What's in it?"

"My special brew," Andrea said. "There's a reason I don't feel the cold like other people."

Smith cocked an eyebrow, opened the flask and sniffed, reeling a bit as the heavy tang of alcohol hit his nose.

"Well, quite. Thank you," he said, and tucked the flask into his coat.

"What do we do now? We're in an empty town full of dead people," Owen said.

"There's a war out there, across all of space and time. I've made sure that this planet is left out, but I need someone from Earth to make sure it stays that way."

"Phil would have been a great choice."

"Yes, he would. But I'm sure you two don't want to be the only two people left here when the authorities show up. I think it's best if I take you both far away… if you're alright with that."

"Nothing for us here anymore," Andrea said.

"And I can do my work from anywhere," Owen added.

"Good."

Andrea reached over and tapped Owen on the shoulder. "Pattern holding?"

“Yes. We’re good.”

“It’s about time you took a break. Come look at the outside world for a minute,” Andrea said, handing him a beer.

Owen stood up and took the beer.

“To Earth,” he said, and punched a hole in the bottom of the can.

“May it never be found,” Andrea said, and punched her can.

Owen looked over the lunar landscape at the pale blue dot hanging above it, and smiled.

The Eight Minute War

by Lee Rawlings

1. THE SPEECH

Many a war is declared through a powerful speech. The great leaders deliver the greatest speeches, and I have been fortunate to experience many with my own ears and eyes. But none so delivered as The Visitor gave his.

Our mightiest leaders would shout with passion from static podiums far in the distance; small versions of themselves promising large futures. They issued warnings through metaphor and promised salvation through simile, but no matter how important they built themselves up to be, time and experience made us sceptical of their visions.

The Visitors speech, presented with animated gusto, came from a leader, a natural born general, who literally danced through the crowds; never stopping with a dramatic pause nor trying to be clever with powerful triple sentences, like our politicians and bureaucrats do. He was a general, but he knew what it was to be a soldier and spoke as such. He smiled when he talked of our bravery, and it was an honourable smile. The Visitor praised each of the varied and various worlds - from where we ragtag band of soldiers hailed - with such genuine passion, that every species on board his ship could appreciate the other's involvement. The severity of the situation brought forth concordant feelings towards the Enemy, and as such that one, great speech was all that was needed to bring together each of us, as if creating one gestalt entity: The Army Of TARDIS .

We were one solid war machine, yet we each contributed an individual skill that could bring down the Enemy. On this day, many chosen from their worlds were going to fight and die on the words of a creature, a man with no name, yet we knew and believed in our hearts that he had the means to end the largest and most terrifying War the universe had ever known. When he had visited our worlds and convinced us that we would not have to worry about our destruction as, the Visitor told us, the 'powerful science' of his 'people' would protect our planets. A mighty, fortunate few would fight for him whilst he saved the vulnerable billions. The perfect deal.

The Visitor began his speech from a gantry in front of a library full of old books. His arms gesticulated like a Wind Grinder trying to help us visualise how he had 'borrowed' Time Lord technology to seal our families and our entire planet in some kind of a force field bubble. This was his promise to us for volunteering to destroy the Enemy at a crucial time in this inter galactic feud. He had thanked us all earlier in the day by placing his hand into ours and moving the clasp frantically up and down. This he called a 'hand shake' which was perplexing to some of our brother soldiers from species that neither had hands nor the means to invoke the movement. He left not one creature out. There were over two thousand of us, yet he came to us all with words of praise, comfort and, most importantly, with tactics to destroy the enemy.

His speech continued as he slid down a polished metal pole to the ground floor and leapt like a newly born *Wren Deer* between us, reminding us that representing our worlds to fight in this Army Of TARDIS was a huge honour. I and my legion were extremely proud to be chosen to fight and would not let The Visitor and his plan down.

The mission was simple. A weapon was being constructed that would destroy our system. It was being built by the Enemy, a race with no feelings, emotions or conscience.

"Once a weapon of that magnitude is built," the Visitor told us, "there would be no turning back." It was clear that we had to stop it happening. We were told we were to join forces with something that would tip the balance in our favour. There was a rumour amongst we soldiers that it was an army from the Visitor's own race. On a forgotten Moon with no name we were to land. He assured us his ship would not be detected by the enemy and it would be a day's walk to the where the weapon was being created over a mountain range.

The Visitors source, his ally, he told us, was located on the same planet as the enemy and he had been speaking through "a sort of mental connection" for many weeks with them. This was science beyond my understanding but when he placed his hands on the glass symbols of the control console it became an awesome interaction to watch: a huge powerful machine and a creature working in complete harmony. His race must be something to behold and with a whole army of Visitors by our side, victory felt absolute even at this stage.

The Visitor himself was an impossibility, as was his entire ship. It was always interesting to watch a new platoon from a new species enter through those blue doors. Their reactions to the vast size of the interior had many of my legion breath fast with amusement. Some creatures just gave away their truths through cautious or shocked body movements. I wonder how we looked to the Visitor upon first arrival: a powerful army creeping slowly like innocent children, struck dumb with surprise. During the final speech from the Visitor I cast my eyes across the thousands of creatures, my odd compatriots, one last time.

At the beginning I did not recognise any of the other soldiers on board except for the purple lizard creatures whose name was always impossible to pronounce but sounded

like *Grzzttck*. We have traded with them for some years now and, though initially wary of their odd ways, we found common ground mostly through the drinking of *wrinkly bark milk* and competitive gaming. They have an ability to crush enemies with their tail and their weaponry skills are pinpoint accurate (this, The Visitor said, "Should come in very handy when aiming for eyestalks."). The Spiridons, to begin with, looked like moving hollow Fur Bushes until The Visitor sprayed their leader with a light yellow paint. This race had the curse of invisibility; the fur was a coat. How could these creatures enjoy the beauty of their new born? Or even their loved ones? How would you brag about your war wounds if you could not see them? Being an Invisible would have its uses in War but it is not an ability I would choose for daily living.

The Black Schooners from Velta 5 were cousins of the Voord according to The Visitor, sleek and dark with eye set deep into their heads. This may have been useful had I known who the Voord were. In the half light they became as invisible as the Spiridons, a shadow could hold them in its palm hidden like a spider in a closed fist. With eyes so far into their skulls it was hard to imagine they were the sharpest shooters in the galaxy, but we were promised they were. They never spoke. Just emitted small yellow gas puffs from hollow head roots. It almost looked like thick hair but each tube had its own movement slowly writhing like twenty Black Sluice Worms.

There were two races that were hardened with tough flesh, the large hairy species known as the Harg and the augmented humans of Timo 12. The Augmented were bred for war: aggressive, muscular and with programmed battle plan capability: they were the ultimate hybrid fighting machine. The full humans on that small planet were at peace, only ever sending these special soldiers to war just because they could. An odd concept and one I still cannot fully appreciate. The Visitor complained they never smiled so he 'tinkered' with their programming. He made them all smile but it didn't look right. Their expressions were fixed and creepy.

I am a Cabalian. Made of flesh and bone. My strengths come from a more natural source. My race's greatest weapon is our speed. Our hind legs are powerful and we can run twice as fast as most bipeds and we can jump higher than a Bao Tree. We will be useful "planting magnetic grenades against the Enemy's casing", the Visitor told us. The Mag-grenades have the power to rip apart the special metal they are made of. This pleased me a great deal.

We were a strange collective of thoughts, beliefs and evolution, yet here we all sat, ate and slept, in this temple-ship of the Visitor. This incredible... TARDIS. The science of the TARDIS created a multicultural society with a common tongue. We could understand each other! What would have taken decades to accomplish took days in this majestic and strange ship. Peace reigned and alliances and friendships were forged. The exchange of foods and drink became an amusing pastime. Seeing other races fail to stand up after a dozen capfuls of wrinkly bark milk made my fellow Cabalians fast breath uncontrollably. One Black Schooner, after just four capfuls, was so intoxicated he even missed the pupil of an Earth human's eye in a painting from 200 Cabalian steps away! The Visitor put a stop to this, smiling, he gently slid the picture of 'Moaner Liza', now with a small holes

between her eyes, into a wooden drawer. Our hammocks resided in a part of the ship that contained an odd combination of bronze, gold, wood, drapes, stone, old clanging bell towers and computer technology. It echoed the look of the Calabrian Ska Temples. The mystic Relgons still believe that science and religion should be as one and would have breath-stopped at the 'The Eye of Harmony' and its power held within, they would feel at home here. My soldiers cared not for the higher thoughts of the Relgons, they were just happy to throw darts into a circular board with number symbols upon it or fast breath when a 'funny bone' failed to be removed from 'Operation', one of the Visitor's many strange yet addictive games. And that name. The Visitor, was chosen by us, he told us he had no name and could call him whatever we wanted. After hundreds of suggestions like General, Commander, Leader, Warrior and even unpronounceable Grzzztck words or a collection of gaseous hisses from the schooners we settled on Visitor because to all of us, he was.

The speech finished from a strange looking chair: red cloth covered and threadbare. Yet the Visitor wasn't sat in it, instead he was stood astride its two resting arms and sang out our praises once more, his faith in our fighting abilities and his promise of protection. This was followed by the beating of his chest indicating his two hearts. Music was then created from a twisted hollow tree stump connected to a spinning black disc. I believe the music was called 'Jazz' and the song was named "What a wonderful world". It had been played often in the ship and became the closest thing we had to a battle hymn. Many of the creatures sang it as new creatures arrived through the doors of the ship. The battle hymn was unpleasant to the ear but the sentiment was noted as genuine and the words reminded me of the trees from my country. Although they were not green.

2. THE DOORS

When our Region Leaders showed us our mode of travel to this far-off planet, it took my soldiers many minutes to compose themselves. Our rash amusement was crushed very suddenly when we walked through those blue doors. Magic had been relegated to the past in our culture, except for the Relgons who kept their own brand of mysticism alive, so we were not prone to believing this to be a miracle, but when we first entered the ship the amazement was palpable. The hugeness of the room was more than surprising and the pure fact it was residing within a small Temple proved we were about to be working with a very powerful creature indeed. And then we saw him. How could such a scrawny looking animal be a mighty warrior as promised by our Region Leaders? He was more akin to the Chittering Min Ape, with his long brown skin coat, odd looking mess of hair and thin lipped smile, than a beast with power and intelligence that could lead us to a victorious outcome. Even though we towered over him, within minutes he somehow proved to us he was not to be toyed with. Sharp intellect, precise oratory delivery and honesty is what we Calabrian soldiers pride ourselves on. This creature could have been one of us. He understood our language, he understood our culture and he knew how to make us laugh. (*He could even withstand many hatfuls of wrinkly bark milk although he lost many times at Stone Dice. But nobody is perfect*).

When we entered through those doors we never knew what to expect. Hundreds of us explored the ship for a month but never seem to find an end to it. Occasionally we would come across another lost race. The conversations would inevitably turn to the war, a war, if lost, could wipe out everything living creature in the universe. This is where the blue doors of the TARDIS would lead to the next time we walked through them; to our fates, our destinies and to some, our deaths. But with such fighting experience on this ship, I was confident we would win this war for The Visitor and our home worlds. After the speech all of us, in our thousands, stood staring at the doors a. The Visitor looked over us all and, for a moment, I thought I saw a shadow of flash across his dark eyes. He pressed a button on a control panel and the doors clicked. He nimbly bounced down a few steps, turned and smiled tightly at us all.

"Remember," he said. "everything that I have told you. Good luck and... thank you"

The strange machine issuing forth its 'Jazz', ended its song with the words "*and I think to myself, what a wonderful world*". Our battle anthem, something this army from a thousand planets, could agree on: the words of the battle anthem and its sentiments. A flash of my homeworld in my mind … of my family smiling back at me, hardened my chest and tightened my muscles and pumped adrenalin through my powerful body, ready to protect, ready to fight. The doors were suddenly thrown open and purple light flooded in. The Visitor's silhouette held aloft the thin silver glowing stick buzzing like an irritated insect. The buzzing increased and the craft's doors impossibly widened. *Widened until they were larger than the interior itself*...

The Visitor grinned. "Well that's the first time that's ever worked!" and pocketed his device and stepped out into, what we hoped would eventually be a new future, for all of us, for the whole Universe. A thought briefly occurred to me, that this would be the first alien world I had ever stepped upon. It was not to last long.

3.THE FIELD

The sky was light purple and the dirt was bleached white. It took a few moments for our eyes to adjust but we had walked out to the foot of a hill. A few rocks and twisted trees were dotted around, ancient and forgotten. Mountains dominated the horizon behind us and patches of deep purple cloud clung to their summits. Back on Cabalia at the edge of a battle field whilst camping, awaiting orders, some of the legion would attempt to create shapes out of the clouds to pass the time and dissolve any fears of never seeing our homesteads again. Floating simulacra from childhood were often seen; A Tyberian Droga, Dagwas Petal Fruit and even the puzzling right angles of wild Bamplummian Owl. I saw no familiar shapes in these angry skies now before me. I doubt that any one of us did.

We were here on an alien world to meet a "game changer", an "invaluable asset to our cause". I saw no one. Nothing, except a small dwelling. In amongst our patchwork ranks someone spoke. It came from one of the Harg. Its deep guttural voice cut the silence.

"Where is this army you speak of Visitor?". This was Enivel the Harg platoon leader.

His powerful arms could tear a tree trunk direct from the ground yet his slender, sinewy fingers could deftly pick the maggots from its bark and thread a necklace with them. Well, that is what Enivel told us. The visitor believed The Harg could pull open the Enemies domes and rip out the creatures that lay within. Once their electronic defences were down. This was an advantage The Visitor had been working on when he started bringing us all together.

"My army lives in that hut, Enivel" the Visitor said.

"Is that bigger on the inside too?"

The Visitor bellowed a hearty laugh." Not in the slightest, Enivel. My army is but one wise man"

There was a ripple of murmurs throughout the ranks. "We have good fighters here," snapped Enivel. "Many good fighters. But you promised us *an army* from the inside! Yet all you have is *one* man?"

"Calm yourself big fella," said The Visitor, placing a conciliatory hand on Enivel's arm.

"This man has great and powerful telepathic abilities, he will read the enemies mind, detect their motives and project it into your *minds.* Before their every move, he will have already anticipated it and fed it into your skulls, giving you *second sight*. But you must give in to your intuitions and go with your first thoughts? Your minds must be open."

As he spoke, he walked backwards gesticulating ecclesiastically with his arms as he went.

"Oh and for the record," he continued, "I never said I had a spare army. That was an assumption on your parts" he smiled wider than a Smirker and, bursting with energy, turned and hopped over a small bush, and running up to the hut, knocked at the door and placed his hands behind him. A strange gesture indicating trust on his part I believe. The door wasn't locked and swung quietly open. The Visitor framed yet another doorway but this time his body looked unsure whether to proceed. There was pause and then suddenly he turned back to us, eyes ablaze.

"RUN!" The Visitor screamed at the top of his voice "IT'S A TRAP!"

4. THE BATTLE

We stood fast. I was in the front line, poised ready for anything. But as the Visitor ran towards us eyes wide, pointing and motioning us to run back to the TARDIS, we looked about us for an enemy. But we saw nothing. Nothing behind him, us or anywhere else. Then a body fell from the sky and crumpled on the dirt ground, bones shattering, we realised with terrible clarity that they had been here the whole time.

Like the Spiridons, they were somehow, unseen. The body was of a hermit, judging by his dyed cloth and bare feet. He looked to be the creature that inhabited the hut we were facing. This body was just a husk, brittle and charred, steaming vapour rising from it like every inch of his being had been sucked dry and left to blacken over a fire. The

Visitor didn't look down, instead he vaulted over the body and shouted something that was drowned out in an instant by a noise like no other I had ever heard. The sound was like metal grinding, there were words in amongst the noise that were indistinguishable and this could only have belonged to The Enemy. The army turned to the skies but there was nothing there! The Visitor made it to the frontline and bumped hard into my shoulder and I could see his eyes looking angry and fearful. He turned for a split second and mouthed "Run if you want to live" and pushed his way through to the TARDIS. I was not running from a battlefield. This is what I was bred to do. Then, from nowhere, blue energy bolts rained from the sky, each shot hitting soldiers of our army. The entire front line was decimated, two comrades either side of me, two different species, glowed blue, their skeletal form revealed for a moment, then fell to the ground. Except me, they had missed me, I was still standing. I looked up, my weapon poised, trying to identify a target when I saw the Enemy appear from out of nowhere and oh... how fierce their battle cry was and how devious and unrelenting they were, screaming in a grating metallic voice "EXTERMINATE!"

Their armour casing, covered in bulbous black half balls looking like insect eyes, just shimmered when The Black Schooners fired their pulse rifles at them. Concentrating their fire, the second best shots in the Galaxy were unleashing a furious wrath upon these bronze titans, but their energy beams simply skimmed off them, distorting the area around their metal bodies. The reply was almost impossible to witness. The Black Schooners were all annihilated in a breath. The full force of a hundred of these metal creatures concentrating their fire on the entire platoon of Schooners was the worst atrocity I had ever witnessed. Three hundred creatures snuffed out in the clack of a wing. My body tensed and my hand grabbed two Mag-grenades. At the point of launching myself at these demons, two of my Legion Brothers cut across me and leapt up at full height and velocity, managing to avoid blast-fire on the way up, at the flying Enemy. They were fast and laid a good six Mag-grenades on the Enemies metal skirts in just a few seconds. These would "tear their casing in two" The Visitor had told us, but when the grenades exploded and the ground vibrated and my Legion Brothers fell to the ground as corpses in a blue glow, all that happened was that the Enemy were rocked off of their axis from the blast, spinning slightly, but then regrouping only to rain down more hell.

Enivel howled at the wasting of his army.

The Spiridons were detected and picked off one by one in under ten seconds, their invisibility useless against these seemingly invincible killers.

The Augmentst thundered forward grinning, seventy men built for war, with killing on their minds... A flash and they evaporated into dust, metal and flesh particles swirling in eddies before settling into the white dirt colouring it a dark rusty red.

The final standing race were the Grzzztck, they had powerful tails and like the Schooners they were pinpoint accurate snipers. Their concentrated firepower upon the eyestalks seem to affect one of the Enemy and, screaming "My vision is impaired", it peeled away from its ranks to let a healthier specimen take its place. That was it, the only damage done. The Enemy were unscathed, untouched, unharmed and they just carried on unleashing death upon the remains of the Army Of TARDIS without mercy. Eventually the

Grzzztck were just a memory and all of our strengths and abilities, our individual reasons for being chosen for this battle, were all for nought. The Mag-grenades, fire power and our tactics were useless. Nothing worked. Something had gone terribly wrong with The Visitor's plan.

5. THE SILENCE

The TARDIS army was decimated in just over a minute. Every single soldier, from so many different planets, was gone. How was this possible? The Enemy seemed to have had the upper hand, they were guessing our every move, how? They wiped us out all too easily. And yet here I was. Still standing. The sole survivor of the carnage. I thought better than to attack with the strap of useless Mag-grenades across my breast and the two in my hand. A soldier I am, a fool I am not. Instead, I stood still and waited for my end to come with dignity and pride. Holding back the crushing fear and sadness that wanted to engulf my soul I kept my eyes open, defying their power of the Enemy and watched as the metallic killing machines silently hovered over the charred bodies and powder that were once my comrades in arms. The field smelt of death. I imagine they cannot smell death, which is why they are probably so fearless. There were no sounds on the field except for the humming of their workings.

A single machine glided slowly toward me, its energy gun pointing at my head, the eye stalk penetrating my soul. All was silent except for its humming. Then an impossible thing happened. It turned and flew past me. It just left me there. Was this some kind of cruelty not foreseen? To leave one soldier as a witness to their destructive powers? Was I to tell other worlds of them, to sow the seed of terror they so readily own or was I left to endure the agony of grief and the haunting memories of this horrific defeat at their twisted whim? The Silence was unbearable. I needed to cry out but was beaten to it.

"All enemies of the Daleks have been exterminated, except for one"

I knew now this was my time. Maybe they would take me for torture. I placed my hand on my heart to swear not to tell them a thing when it touched an unfamiliar object; A small oblong circuit board on a string was hanging around my neck.

6. THE MUSIC

The Enemy were busy exchanging information, probably with a command point, "The Enemy of the Daleks still lives. The Doctor has survived the ambush. Extraction of the hermit's knowledge and power was successful to 99 percent. Camouflage mode was successful to 100 percent. We are to use Time Lord Technology to deliver the Pulse on the Doctor's return. The Doctor always returns."

A Doctor? Can they really not see me? I stared at the circuit board and couldn't work out how it had arrived there or why I was seemingly invisible to The Enemy. The two things must be connected. Where was the TARDIS? Where had he gone? Was the Visitor's name The Doctor? A Medicine creature? Not a War General? This made no sense. It was

hard enough watching our 'saviour' running from the field. I could not have imagined him to be the one who ran away from anything. Especially if he really was a Doctor.

The Visitor had been wrong in his speech. He had been wrong about everything. Our planets called him a saviour. He was no saviour. He was certainly no commander, no leader and no wise and clever plotter. He had made a mistake that cost us our lives and then he just ran. He *ran*!

I stood there, buffleheaded, on my first alien planet, standing amongst the still warm corpses and ashes of my fellow space traveller's, while an army of heartless metal creatures just metres away plotted his death. And I too, but for different reasons. I swore that if ever I saw him again I would hold him to his promise to keep our worlds safe or else I would gut him and leave him to this planet's wild animals. As my thoughts began drift into torturing this so-called Doctor, a strange wind struck up blowing the dust of the dead into the Enemies vision.

Impossibly I could hear our Battle Hymn drift across the field of the dead, it seem to come from the wind itself, the same crackling Jazz we had been subjected to in the TARDIS for months on end.

"I see friends shaking hands. Sayin' "How do you do?" They're really sayin', "I love you"

Every single one of The Enemy's domes turned and faced my direction, eyestalks fixed, their bodies followed, twisting until their guns were poised and aiming straight at me. There was nothing I could do so I closed my eyes and thought of my Homestead, my family, my world. It would be the last beautiful image I would see before moving on from this realm to inevitable death.

"I hear babies cry, I watch them grow, They'll learn much more, Than I'll ever know "

In my mind's eye I gazed upon the children playing in the fields of silver corn. The music must have been in my head. Behind the children, moving to the rhythm of the wind were trees full of leaves, red, grey and black, floating and laying still upon the grass. And I thought to myself, yes, what a wonderful world...

"Get in" a voice hissed urgently. I was shocked out of my daydream and turned immediately to face The Visitor, his dark eyes alert. His TARDIS was open and his hand was in mine.

"NOW!"

He pulled me hard. I responded by leaping over his head and through the doors. A second leap took me close to the central console. Behind me I heard the Enemy scream their mantra of "EXTERMINATE" and they opened fire. Nearly all of their energy bolts were deflected by the TARDIS' forcefield except one, which narrowly missed me but hit the console sending a shower of sparks over towards the Jazz machine and the old chair. The Jazz made a scraping sound and was left to repeat a crackling on its own. The Visitor went to kick the door closed but from nowhere came a strange wave of energy that knocked us both off of our feet , we moved slowly through the air for a split second then sped up

landing with full force on the ship's floor.

"No no NO! "Don't you dare!" he screamed. "I *promised.* Please...NO!!"

The Visitor was up on his legs and vaulted across the console to its furthest side, his hands already working on the dials and switches before his feet hit the ground. He looked terrified. I leapt to the TARDIS doors and hit them hard. They thumped closed. The ship juddered and groaned and sounded like it was grating, hard metal against metal. Then it was still. The vessel was calm. The Visitor walked slowly towards me, eyes fixed on mine, no smile, no vestige of hope in his eyes .His hand found a small lever which seemed to stop The Jazz Machine's crackling. His eyes never left mine.

"I am so, so, sorry" he said and slumped against the console

7. THE PROMISE

I had my hands around his neck seven feet in the air when I saw that he was wearing the same circuit as me around his neck. I would hate not knowing what it was, so I dropped him. Still choking and rubbing his back, The Visitor asked me why I had stopped trying to kill him and I told him.

"What is this around me and how did it get there?"

"Perception Filter. Popped it on you when I ran to the TARDIS just after they dropped my friend from the sky"

"Why me?"

"Why not?"

I had no sympathy for his one loss, hundreds of my soldiers and good friends were no longer in this realm because of his mistakes.

"Who was this one man army you spoke of? I thought you said he was powerful!"

"He was, he really was." he replied, sadly. "I told you of his powers. Telepathy, so quick it would seem like he could predict what would happen next for you all. Except…" He slumped into the old red chair "they got there before me."

He put his head into his hands and finally looked up.

"They used his powers against us, against me. I don't know how, but that's why they were so quickly."

"What about you and your deactivation of the Enemies strength fields to make it easier for us to kill them"

"Traitor"

My nerves tightened "WHAT?"

"Yes, Probably Enivel. You see, the hard are ever so slightly telepathic and probably had the telepathic link with my friend. Except it wasn't him of course, it was the Daleks. He may have been tricked or maybe he was promised to be a ruler of his people, but

whatever the reason, it was probably he who sabotaged the mechanism I had in place. My Sonic Screwdriver couldn't activate it."

"So, two mistakes. But this isn't why you said sorry. That had depth beyond this catastrophe"

" Yes." He stood up and I could see water on his cheek leaving his eye.

"I am truly, truly sorry but I have broken my promise."

8. THE MEMORY

I was too distraught to be angry. I lost my balance and became lightheaded, needing to sit. He tried to help me to the chair but I suddenly stiffened and clenched hold of his shoulders ready to crush the life from him.

He spoke fast, "That wave of energy. That blast through the doors. That was a Pulse from a Time Lord weapon. Normally it would age anything in its path but it bypassed us and specifically locked onto the TARDIS's circuits leading to the Eye of Harmony. I suspect Enivel set that link up, the result was the Pulse travelled through the vortex, amplifying as it went. Spinning through the link from my TARDIS to your world... to all of the worlds. I promised to protect them and I failed." He looked at the ground "Good God, what have I done?"

"Yes, Doctor, what have you done exactly?" His eyes met mine again, he was surprised at my knowing his title

" What was their demise?"

"They were… aged out of existence"

"Gone? Forever? Is there no way of reversing this?" He shook his head slowly "Just.. gone?"

The Doctor became emotional and was finding it hard to talk.

"Yes. I... I had the fail-safes in place, the codes locked in the back of my mind. The Daleks must have extracted it via my link with my hermit friend… and I thought I was talking to *him*! They planned this from the outset. We never stood a chance. This carefully chosen vanguard I created would have blown a hole in their defences and destroyed the weapon they were creating except… they were never creating a weapon. The whole thing was a trap! I should have realised the weapon was... me. My TARDIS. This was supposed to save your system, your planets and, eventually, *my* people. This victory would have reminded the Daleks that there are worlds that will always rise against them. Other worlds would have taken heart, solidarity would have bloomed across the stars, they would have taken up arms, they would have..." He started sobbing.

This was no leader. This was a reckless, misguided egomaniac. A man who needed reining in. A man who needed to help people, not to destroy. His destructive plans wiped out my entire legion, my entire civilisation and other races that were now no longer in existence. No matter what promises were made. My home was gone. My family, gone. My

way of life, gone. My race gone. I felt suddenly very alone in the universe. Grief started to drip through my body and anchored me to the spot. My throat felt tight and I choked out rapid tiny silent breaths. Our race does not 'cry' but our bodies still feel the pain of loss. I suddenly felt his fingers on my temple. Shocked I moved away.

"No. Wait. I can make your pain ease. I wouldn't ever do this unless I thought it had to be done… do you want to be rid of pain and loss?"

I pushed his hands away from my head, "Leave me alone. I want the pain. I need to remember. I will live with the memories. A creature is the sum of his memories."

"A Time Lord even more so." he said, nodding sadly. "I understand. Where will you go?"

"I will seek my revenge. It may take years but I will get it. This defeat is not the end. These minutes are not the end. I have many more minutes to give and I shall give them to building an army and the destruction of the Enemy... the Daleks, and make them suffer greatly."

"I see." the Doctor said. "It seems you are a born warrior."

"I am"

"I wished to be so," he said, turning his back to me and punching buttons on the console, "but I still have so much to learn. I thought I was ready but..."

"But you failed."

"Yes. I failed." The Doctor turned around to face me. His eyes were dark, his face set, brow furrowed. He seemed emboldened. Determined. "It shan't happen again."

9.THE CIRCLE

I was to keep the special circuit necklace. It was his gift to me from him. I pocketed the device and scanned my new surroundings. He had landed at a space port, a thriving community with many different species bustling about their business. I didn't recognise any of the Creatures. I know why he did this. To remind me of the other races still yet to be saved, still unaware of the potential deadly universal destruction awaiting them. I am to warn them. To rally them together. To make them understand they need to fight for their survival. I will lead them. I will be their saviour. I will not make mistakes and they will not suffer my world's fate. As the TARDIS began to fade from the port a small ugly alien child tugged my hand. I could understand it for a minute or so before the TARDIS was completely gone.

"Hey, are you visiting here?"

"Yes" I replied " I am ... a visitor"

The child's language faded and I was suddenly a stranger in a strange land, but I needed no words for my quest. My speech would be plain and simple; Love your fellow worlds and unite and protect their unique place in the Universe.

Under a silver tree on an Alien Moon a man in a brown coat sits and stares up to where a planet used to reside. Music drifts on the thin air. “ and I think to myself” His hands beat his chest indicating his two hearts, he utters a promise to the empty skies. A promise he swears he will never break again. The drifting song ends, crackling with age and the man’s head sinks into his hands. “…what a wonderful world”.

Everything in its Right Place

by J.R. Southall

'Tis the voice of the Doctor; I heard him declare,
"I have grizzled my face, and greyed all my hair.
As the girl has her blue dress, so I have my sling
Trimmed with belt and with bullets, and a war song to sing."

When the grass runs bright red, he is dark as a Lord,
And will cower from George and his dragon-slaying sword,
But, when the bar opens and cowboys come round,
Both the Stranger and I will go deep underground.

Alice, in her pretty blue dress, stood in the middle of the vast expanse of grass known as the Pavilion of Meditation, and watched. Had she been inclined to wonder how long she'd been waiting, she might have concluded that she'd been waiting rather too long. But Alice was not inclined towards wondering. She did, however, know what she was waiting for, and so she stood and watched.

Her counterpart in the Continent of Place, Ali G, had had a false alarm some time previously. Alice had learned this through her communications with Aliaah, the bringer of truths. And now the Continent of Place had a new idol, an enormous blue box, to which people might have made pilgrimages in order to worship, had they been so persuaded. Alice would have doubted that people might be so disposed, were Alice capable of doubt.

The silence was broken suddenly by the sound of thunder, distant and yet close by, and with what ought to have been surprise, Alice saw a big blue box appear as if out of nowhere in front of her. The thunderous noise rose to a crescendo and then stopped suddenly, and Aliaah's cold voice whispered to Alice, "He is here."

Alice stood absolutely still, as still as the air around her had now once again become, and waited.

The door at the front of the big blue box swung open and a strangely dressed man toppled out. He was a man dressed as no other Alice might ever have seen, somewhere between tramp and warrior, and she noticed the black eyes, the dark shadow of beard and the elfin face as he tumbled to the ground. She did not move to help. It did not occur to

her that this was something she might do.

The man sat up and looked around, running his hands across the grass as if he was swimming through it. Then he looked straight into Alice's eyes and spoke.

"Where is the sky?" the stranger asked.

Alice did not reply, although she recognised his voice.

"I must have forgotten to reset the coordinates," the stranger said, as if he was talking as much to himself as he was to Alice, "and the poor thing crashed."

Alice said nothing.

The stranger rose to his feet, cautiously, looking Alice up and down. She said nothing, merely watched him as he approached.

"And the reason it crashed," the stranger told Alice, who had not asked, "is because *this* place shouldn't *be* here."

Still Alice watched the stranger silently, waiting for an instruction from Aliaah which must come presently.

"You know how I know this place isn't supposed to be here?" the stranger continued. "Because I forgot to reset the coordinates. This is where Earth used to be – and Earth isn't here anymore. I saw to that."

Had Alice been inclined towards asking questions, she might have enquired as to what Earth was – and what the stranger might have done with it. But Alice didn't ask questions, and her mind did not enquire. She simply waited for an instruction or created an event. The event came first.

"Strictly speaking," the stranger continued, adjusting his long coat "The earth is precisely where it has always been. Just nudged out of time ever so slightly. The vortex misdirected away from the time lines. So when I say that this is where earth used to be, I'm being rather disingenuous. It's where the earth used to be *in* the vortex. No time travellers should be able to come here unless they have the exact coordinates. And they don't. Only I do. And... why am I telling you this?

As the stranger looked at Alice with what she might have perceived to be a mixture of irritation and curiosity, she saw him turn in a swift movement back towards the big blue box as a dragon fell out of the sky upon it.

The stranger stumbled backwards into Alice and sent the pair of them collapsing to the ground. Alice felt neither pain nor grievance, and the stranger simply stared slack-jawed as the dragon enveloped the big blue box within the span of its wings. Alice watched both stranger and dragon, as the enormous green-scaled creature whipped the box into the air, tossed it from one side to the other and then swallowed it whole.

"Well," said the stranger. "That *is* a first."

With a mighty roar the dragon lifted its head skywards and blew a plume of bright

orange flame towards the ceiling high above them.

Alice felt the stranger grasp her around the forearm in what she might have understood to be shock or fear. She watched passionlessly as the dragon lowered its head once again and focussed its attention on the two of them. Alice felt the stranger tense, as if preparing to fight or flee, when he twitched abruptly at yet another surprise.

A second man was between them, astride a mighty white steed.

The stranger gasped, but Alice could see that whatever he wanted to say wasn't yet formed either in his mind or on his lips, and instead his wide eyes darted between the man on horseback and the beast.

This new man, this knight, was dressed more ordinarily, after a fashion that Alice could recognise. He wore chain-mail and a white tunic emblazoned with a red cross over his chest, and he swung a huge and heavy sword playfully as he eyed up the dragon.

"The Fairy Queen has sent me to do brave deeds in this world," the knight announced.

"I have no doubt," the stranger said with what Alice might have gathered was incredulity. He was about to speak again when the second man snapped the reins at the horse's neck and both knight and steed pounced forwards, into combat with the dragon.

It was over in an instant; the dragon reared and puffed out its chest, preparing to belch a mighty gust of fire towards the knight who approached beneath it. But as it did so, the knight plunged his sword deep into the creature's exposed belly and with a terrible scream it flapped and rose into the air, expelling a cloud of thick black smoke, before plunging back down and into the ground, leaving a huge, ragged hole behind it.

Alice watched all this silently and without expression.

The knight turned and winked at both Alice and the stranger, cracked the horse's reins once more, and rode over the edge of the hole and into the darkness beyond in pursuit of the dying dragon.

Alice rose carefully to her feet, and awaited an instruction. The stranger stood up too, with rather less measure, and spoke. "What place in hell *is* this?" he asked.

Aliaah's voice whispered softly to Alice, and gave instruction. "*Tell him nothing*," Aliaah said. "*Tell him nothing – but bring him to me. Allow him to think his progress is at his own preference.*" Alice inclined her head an imperceptible fraction of a movement, and said nothing.

"Are you capable of speech?" the stranger persisted. "All this, and you haven't said a word."

"I am," Alice said.

"Then tell me," he said, "what place is this?"

"*I said tell him nothing*," Aliaah repeated in Alice's ear.

"It is..." Alice began.

"*Nothing!*" Aliaah demanded.

"It is the Pavilion of Meditation," Alice finished. She was entirely unconscious of the fact that she had just broken Aliaah's instruction. She had never broken Aliaah's instruction before. The stranger had a persuasive voice.

"The Pavilion of Meditation indeed," the stranger said. "I meant the planet. What *planet* is this?"

"Planet," Alice repeated, drawing the syllables out as if the word was strange to her. Concept was not something of which Alice had any knowledge or understanding. But the voice of Aliaah was growing louder in her head repeating a single word she could not fathom or determine, excited and chattering, almost expectant, and she began to feel something she could not comprehend.

"The planet," said Alice.

"Yes?" said the stranger.

"The planet is ... TARDIS," Alice said in a monotone, the word strange and unknown on her lips.

"What?" the stranger said, his eyes widened and voice loudened.

"TARDIS. This place is TARDIS," Alice said again, her voice rising in inflection, the way the words of Aliaah repeated in her head, in a manner she might not have known was anticipative.

And then they stopped. Alice touched a finger involuntarily to her temple. She could not understand why she had said what she had just said.

The stranger was looking about him this way and that with what would have been agitation. But Alice was concentrating on the silence.

Then Aliaah spoke once more.

"*We have the box*," he said, cold and soft. "*Tell the stranger nothing, but allow him to bring himself to me*."

Alice inclined her head again by the tiniest margin, comprehending the instruction.

"*We have a plan*," Aliaah said, and fell silent.

The stranger stopped pacing and looked directly at Alice.

"I don't know what's going on here," he said, "but I intend to find out. And you're going to help me."

"Yes," said Alice. She did not know why she said it.

The stranger appeared taken aback. Alice felt confusion and recognised the same thing in the man in front of her. There was an unintelligible murmur in her head, Aliaah

expressing some unknowable emotion of which Alice had no understanding. Then Alice raised her hand, and held it aloft as if about to conduct some invisible orchestra into existence.

"They come," she said, her voice returned to a monotone.

The stranger glanced behind him, looked over Alice's shoulder, peered up into the finite sky.

"Who comes?" he asked, but the answer appeared before Alice could reply.

In every direction identical business-suited men danced from the horizon, each holding aloft a bright umbrella in a rainbow of colours, and began to close in towards the stranger and Alice.

"What madness is this now?" the stranger barked.

And although it went against everything that Alice was, she could not help but answer him, quoting words that seemed as if they had been chosen for her.

"Why don't you just say you don't like being alone," she said. "I don't see what I could do. I have no influence over you." She watched the stranger look at her with a flicker of recognition, and deep inside she began to feel something. But her raised hand stayed firm.

The rainbow of umbrellas closed in.

"Time for action," the stranger said, taking Alice by the waist and pulling her towards the hole in the ground. As he did so, Alice felt her hand drop and suddenly the umbrellas were no longer being carried by a multitude of identical business-suited men, but were now carrying themselves inexorably closer, entirely of an indeterminate airborne volition.

The stranger reached into his pocket and Alice saw him pull something out, something pencil-shaped and metallic. His thumb flicked an unseen switch and a whirring sound began to emit from the device. Alice's hand snapped erect and the stranger baulked.

"Stand and deliver!" snarled a man dismounting a horse between them.

The stranger lost his grip on Alice's waist and she fell back to the ground once again, her hand coming down hard to protect her from the fall. The stranger stumbled back away from this new arrival, a man wearing a tricorne and a cape, and with a slash of white paint across his face. The man took a gun from his belted holster as he finished dismounting the horse.

"What now?" the stranger asked Alice, whose concentration had been lost.

"I'm the dandy highwayman," the tricorne man said, "who she's too scared to mention."

"The 'dandy highwayman'?" the stranger asked, with what Alice might have detected was disbelief.

The man in the tricorne pointed his gun at the stranger.

“What’s the point of robbery,” he said, with what might or might not have been disappointed eyes, “when nothing is worth taking?”

And then as Alice watched, the air in front of her became a blur of colour, as the self-propelling umbrellas finally arrived. Through the dancing shapes, she saw a struggle between the stranger and the highwayman, and heard that whirring sound again as the stranger wielded his electronic gadget. And then the whirring grew suddenly louder as the stranger loomed over her and touched the device against her head.

Alice’s world was plunged into darkness.

“Where ... am I?” Alice said, waking.

“A tavern of some kind,” the stranger replied. He was sitting on a stool propped up against a wooden bar in a dusky, dusty, oddly-shaped room. “That’s Earl Ecklund, Charles Bukowski and Bluto having a drink together,” he added, gesturing to the far end of the room. “I don’t even know who Bluto *is*.”

“The dandy highwayman,” Alice said. She felt...

he *felt*. Alice could feel the warmth of the room against her skin. She was lying on a bench in a booth behind the stranger. She tried to signal to Aliaah but no response came.

The stranger shrugged. “No, not him. But it’s good you’re asking questions.”

The stranger’s voice had a familiar, reassuring quality. It was deep and gentle, and oddly comfortable.

“How did we get here?” Alice said, sitting up and trying to understand.

“We didn’t,” the stranger said. “We haven’t moved, Alice. We’re in exactly the same place.”

Alice looked around the room and tried to remember what had just happened. She had never been unconscious before. She had never not remembered before.

“You know my name,” she said.

“You’re a construct of some kind,” the stranger said. “An artificial life, hence the prefix I expect. I’m guessing you have friends called Ali Baba and probably Alistair, am I right?”

Alice stood and gingerly joined the stranger at the bar. He was facing a drink. There was a low throb of voices all around them, and the dark shapes of other patrons in the shadows.

“Where have I been?” Alice asked.

“You haven’t been anywhere,” the stranger said, quietly. “You’ve been asleep. I don’t suppose you’ve ever experienced sleep, have you?”

Alice looked around the room, which, she was surprised to discover, appeared to form a hexagonal around the bar in its centre. In each of the six walls was a closed door.

"I've retuned your inhibitors. They're now exhibitors," the stranger said, mysteriously. "The six doors," he continued. "Where do they lead?"

"Each door is a pilot," Alice answered distantly.

"Indeed? We might be better advised to take the seventh, then."

"The seventh?" Alice could feel something was different, very different. The stranger had said she was asking questions. Had she never asked questions before? "What's happening to me?"

The stranger pointed over the counter, and Alice could see a trap-door set in the floor beyond the bar.

"Down," he said. "The seventh door."

"No," she told him emphatically. "We must not go down."

"Oh really? Well in that case, that is exactly what we must do." The stranger smiled, and his lined faced opened up; he looked much younger when he was smiling. "Don't worry," he told her. "You're starting to feel a little more human, that's all. I think I've cured you."

"We *must* not go down," Alice was categorical. "Are you some kind of a doctor?"

"Some kind," the stranger said. And then the six doors burst open.

Alice watched as the room began to fill with men holding pistols and wearing blue jeans and chaps, with Stetsons on their heads. She felt something cold at the pit of her stomach – her stomach? Did Alice have a stomach? Why did she feel a chill sense of dread there?

The first man, evidently the leader, spoke.

"Hände hoch!" he said, with command.

The stranger calmly lifted a flap on the counter beside him and hissed at Alice, "Quickly, through here." She didn't need telling twice.

"Nicht bewegen!" the cowboy barked, and as the stranger urged Alice towards the trapdoor in the floor, he reached inside his pocket and pulled out that whirry thing again. Alice lifted open the hatch and took a couple of hesitant steps into the darkness.

"Dies ist Ihre letzte Warnung!" the lead cowboy said to the stranger, pointing the gun at him. The stranger pointed the tiny gadget right back at the cowboy and it began to make its little noise. For a second nothing happened, and then the cowboy pulled the trigger.

The stranger ducked and the bullet whizzed right over his head, shattering a bottle on the shelf behind him.

Faster than Alice could imagine, the stranger swept her down the steps and slammed the trapdoor closed behind them. “That was a little too real for comfort!” he said, and taking the lead, directed her down into the shadows below. It was too dark to see anything.

Alice was hesitant.

“We should not be going this way,” she told him.

“We’re not going the other way!” he growled back. “Besides, we need to get to the bottom of this. And if you want to get to the bottom of something, there’s only one direction to take.”

They reached a kind of plateau in the gloom, and the stranger added, “What’s your problem with being underground, anyway?”

Alice was about to answer when the trapdoor swung back open above them, filling the space with light. They were surrounded by ice, in some kind of a cave. Everywhere Alice could see, short men clad in green were boxing toys and trinkets and wrapping them in brightly coloured paper.

“This is getting harder to keep a handle on,” the stranger gasped. And then, looking back up towards the open trapdoor, added, “And the trouble keeps on coming.”

Alice followed his gaze and saw what he was looking at.

Silhouetted in the light she could see a bizarre shape. “Doctor, what is that?” she said.

“If I’m not very much mistaken...” the stranger began to say, when the shape in the opening suddenly sprang forwards down the steps towards them.

The stranger grasped Alice by the hand and pulled her towards the busying elves all around them. “Quick, hide,” he gasped. “And whatever you do, *please* don’t call me ‘doctor’!”

“I thought you said you *were* a doctor?” Alice asked, as they plunged behind some boxes just in the nick of time.

The stranger made a shushing gesture with his finger, and then whispered, “‘*Was*’ being the operative word. Not any more.”

He and Alice peered over the top of the boxes to take stock of what was happening in the middle of the ice grotto. The bizarrely-shaped creature had arrived at the bottom of the steps leading down from the saloon above, and now that the light was no longer behind it, Alice could see it much more clearly. It appeared to be a man-sized cartoon mouse in a funny pair of red and black shorts and shirt. And it was carrying a gun.

“What is it?” she whispered.

“Another impossible thing,” the stranger whispered back. “Seems to be the day for it. Come on.”

He led Alice towards the back of the grotto, where a shadowy alcove led to what seemed to be a way out. Against her better judgement, Alice allowed him to lead her. Somehow, in spite of her apprehension at their journey underground, she found him reassuring. She had never needed reassurance before. And his hand felt comfortable in her own. In spite of the situation, she couldn't help wondering how she'd failed to notice all of these things her entire life.

"An exit," said the stranger; they were standing at the top of a gentle slope leading even further down into the dark, where the ice walls gave way to damp rock.

"Tell me about the 'impossible things'," said Alice. "Tell me how you knew my name."

"Everybody knows your name," said the stranger. "It's one of the first things they learn when they're old enough to have stories read to them."

"I don't understand."

The stranger hesitantly began their descent down the slope, and gently told her what was happening.

"This whole place," he said, "and everything in it – including you – is impossible. You know how I know it's impossible? Because there shouldn't be anything here at all. The Earth – that's my favourite planet, by the way – was here, once upon a time; when the war started, I removed it to a place of safety. But I should've known; nature abhors a vacuum. And somehow she's reckoned to place you and everything else here, where the Earth should be."

"And why is that so impossible?" Alice asked, fearing for the answer. She wasn't sure whether she liked being described as an 'impossible thing'.

"Because," the stranger began, but then stopped. Alice almost bumped into the back of him. "Someone's coming," he hissed.

Alice peered into the darkness and saw what the stranger had seen. Somewhere in the distance, a shadow was breaking up the inky blackness, making its way gradually towards them.

"Doctor," she said, urgently, tugging the stranger's arm.

"Don't call me that!" he growled, with a hint of almost anger.

"Why am I so 'impossible'? What's so 'impossible' about me?"

"*Because*," the stranger said, turning to look straight at her, "like everything else here, you're *made-up*. Now, get in here."

The stranger pulled Alice into a narrow recess in the tunnel wall, and together they watched the dark shadow as it approached. What now? thought Alice. She wasn't long in finding out.

An extraordinary figure emerged from the darkness. Short, rotund, white-bearded, and clad in a huge red coat and hat, lined with white wool. Alice could barely contain a

gasp.

The diminutive but somehow huge figure heard her intake of breath and turned sharply towards them.

“I know a lord of yours in this land,” he said, to himself as much as to Alice or the stranger. “Let him be sent for.”

It was almost a request as much as it was a statement, and Alice was – not for the first time since she had woken up – left puzzled.

“This is seriously out of kilter,” the stranger muttered to himself.

“Doctor?” said Alice.

“I told you not to call me that,” he growled back. “Nobody calls me that any more.”

The red-clad figure raised his hands and began to bear down on them.

“What did you do with the whirry thing, what did you do to me to send me to sleep?”

“I broke your inhibitions,” the stranger said. “Why? What difference does it make?”

“But why? Why did you do it?” Alice persisted.

The red-clad figure’s hands suddenly shifted and changed and began to blur, turning into daggers at the end of his arms.

“Because you were acting as a conduit for the illusions!” the stranger gasped. “Why is it so important?”

Alice knew what she had to do. She reached down and picked up a good-sized rock, and smacked the stranger unconscious across the back of his head.

Alice sat and watched as the stranger regained consciousness. He heaved himself up groggily, rubbing the back of his neck, and gave her the filthiest look she had ever received. She had never received a filthy look before, and this one made her feel quite affronted.

“What on Earth did you do that for?” the stranger said, his eyes all the while darting around as he took his bearings.

They were sitting in a quiet, empty space, surrounded by grey nothingness. In front of them the only object that occupied the otherwise constant panorama. A wardrobe. As the stranger’s eyes landed upon it, Alice saw him shudder involuntarily.

“You broke my illusions,” Alice said. “I needed to break yours.”

The stranger couldn’t draw his eyes away from the wardrobe, but nodded indiscernibly.

"You might have borrowed the sonic screwdriver," he said eventually.

"I see your fear," Alice said, standing and walking to the wardrobe. She took hold of the door handle and pretended to give it a tug.

"Stop – don't!" the stranger gasped.

Alice looked down at him and felt the corners of her mouth tug into an expression she didn't recognise.

"Very funny."

The stranger let Alice help him to his feet. She could feel how tense he was through his stiff clammy hands.

"Are you afraid?" she asked him.

"Afraid? No," he replied. "I've spent a thousand years travelling among the most perilous places in the universe, fighting the most evil beings creation has managed to spew forth. But ever since I got here all I've been doing is trying to work out what the merry hell is going on, and trying to get back to my TARDIS..."

"TARDIS?" Alice exclaimed.

"TARDIS, yes. My Ship. The blue box that dragon took."

"But, 'TARDIS' was the word..."

"The name of this place, this 'planet', yes. Somehow the one is responsible for the other – but I haven't quite worked out how, yet. Tell me Alice, have you ever felt the sun on your face?"

Alice mulled the stranger's question over.

"No," she said.

"No Van Allen Belt," the stranger said. "An open sky would mean a scorched Earth. Someone – someone or some*thing* – needs to keep this place clean and healthy. And stocked with oxygen. I wonder who? I wonder why? Not for your benefit, I shouldn't think."

"You think Aliaah doesn't care about me?" Alice asked.

"Did *you* care, until today?" the stranger replied.

"I – didn't," Alice admitted.

"Aliaah, that fits."

Alice and the stranger looked in silence at the wardrobe doors for a moment.

"I lied," the stranger said. "I *am* afraid. But not for me. I'm afraid for you."

"For me? But why?"

"Because if I open this door, *when* I open this door," the stranger said, "that might well be it for you. Adios Alice."

"That might be *it*?"

"Almost certainly. Do you remember yesterday?" the stranger asked.

Alice thought, and could not answer.

The stranger looked at her with his deep sad eyes.

"I can't go back to yesterday because I was a different person then," Alice said.

The stranger made the same expression with his mouth as Alice had made earlier, only although she had done it for happy, when he did it she felt only a pain in her chest. She had not felt a pain like this before, a pain that penetrated deep inside her and left her skin chilled.

The stranger took hold of the wardrobe doors and pulled.

It took Alice a moment to adjust to the harsh light.

She and the stranger were standing in a large, brightly lit white room. The four walls were patterned in indented concentric circles, and in the middle of the room stood the large blue box in which the stranger had arrived, and that the dragon had earlier swallowed.

Alice gasped. "I know this place," she said. "It is the Field of Manipulation. I have heard Aliaah talk of it."

The stranger threw her a sardonic look, and walked up to the blue box.

"My head feels light," Alice said. She stumbled slightly; something was happening to her. She could feel her thought processes fading away, her mind emptying out. She touched her fingers to her temples in concern.

"It's beginning," the stranger said.

"What's beginning?" Alice asked.

"The end."

The voice had come from the other side of the room, and yet it was unmistakably that of the stranger. A man walked out from behind the blue box.

It was the stranger.

Or rather, thought a confused Alice, his exact double. His doppelganger.

"Aliaah?" she said.

The sense of emptiness and bewilderment increased.

"This is Aliaah?" the stranger asked.

"You have returned," Aliaah said.

"What is this place?" asked the stranger. "What's going on?"

"You must know," Aliaah told him. "You are responsible for all of this."

Alice watched the two of them talking to one another, and her comprehension of their words dwindled and ebbed.

The stranger shook his head.

"Can't figure it out?" Aliaah said. "The famous Doctor..."

"Nobody calls me that now."

"...and you can't work it out?"

"This is where the Earth used to be," the stranger said. "And somehow although the Earth has gone, its *imagination* seems to have been left behind. But this isn't just an illusion. Somehow this is all *real*."

Aliaah made a throaty noise that Alice took to indicate what she now understood to be amusement, or at least the pretence of it.

"Well put," he said. "Oh, well put." Then Aliaah became suddenly serious. "I was floating in space," he told the stranger, "just floating. Drifting. When my instruments detected a cloud of dreams drifting alongside me. The thoughts and memories of a planet that was no longer there."

The stranger looked horrified.

"And it tasted good." Aliaah was – gloating, thought Alice, as her comprehending of his words faded fast away. "I began to feed," he continued.

"Horrible," the stranger said.

"Do you know something? The dreams of children are so much the more potent."

"Of course they are," said the stranger.

"To live is the rarest thing in the world," said Aliaah, in words that Alice could sense were not his own. "Most people exist, that is all."

"This above all," replied the stranger in kind. "To thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

"Touché," countered Aliaah. "But life in a box is better than no life at all, I expect. You'd have a chance at least. You could lie there thinking: Well, at least I'm not dead."

Alice could not fathom the game they were playing.

The stranger gave Aliaah a harsh look. "This isn't funny."

"Sir, with no intention to take offence," Aliaah replied, "I deny your right to put words into my mouth."

The stranger looked grimly around him.

"Tell me, why do you need an atmosphere? There are no crew? Although there

must have been one once, or there'd be no atmosphere to begin with."

"I *ate* them," Aliaah said, "and now the oxygen feeds the dreams on which I feast."

"But you can't control them," said the stranger. "Even with your servants – like Alice here – you can't control the dreams. And that must be a worry."

"For a time, I can," Aliaah said. "But that is why I need you, Doctor. You and your TARDIS." He stroked the blue box, in a manner that Alice found unsettling.

Then Aliaah clicked his fingers, and a panel on the opposite wall fell open. Beyond it there was a bank of equipment and a doorway. Two more figures emerged from the doorway.

One was dressed in turban and tunic, the other a yellow tracksuit. Alice recognised them from her communications with Aliaah. They approached the stranger, with menace.

"You forget," the stranger said, producing the whirry thing from his pocket. "I have this." He activated it, and both Ali Baba and Ali G fell to the floor, their consciousness lost.

"Oh but *you* forget," Aliaah replied. "*I* have *this*."

Suddenly Alice felt Aliaah's presence in her mind once more, commanding her. She was powerless to resist, and found herself taking the stranger's arms roughly from behind. She was surprised at her own strength, and he was unable to escape her grasp. The whirry thing, the sonic screwdriver, fell harmlessly to the ground.

"Bring him," said Aliaah, and kicking the inert form of Ali G as he passed, led Alice and the stranger past the blue box and to the far side of the room. As Alice followed, pushing the stranger ahead of her, for some reason she couldn't understand, she paused briefly to pick up the sonic screwdriver, while making sure to keep a tight hold of the stranger's wrists as she did so. This had not been instructed. Alice felt a pang inside as if she had been disobedient, but as Aliaah had not told her *not* to pick up the sonic screwdriver, she considered she hadn't really done anything wrong.

Now that Aliaah was here, Alice's mind began to settle. Began to fill again.

"You've been playing with my toy," he said, to the stranger. "But she *is*, after all, *my* toy."

"I thought I'd free her of you," the stranger replied.

"Nobody is ever free of me," Aliaah replied, and gestured around the white-walled room. "Nor will you ever be free of this place."

They arrived at the alcove and Aliaah gestured to Alice to hold the stranger steady. He then wrenched some cables from the wall and set to work on them.

"I must say," the stranger continued, "it is all very convincing. How do you do it?"

"How do I do what?" Aliaah said, absently.

"How do you make the make-believe real?"

"Manipulation of particles in the air."

"The Field of Manipulation." The stranger shrugged. "But *you're* real."

"Alice and the other A.L.s have moving parts, too. Alice, turn him away from me."

Alice did as she was told, and rotated the stranger until his back was facing Aliaah. Aliaah took the cables and extended them towards the stranger, and Alice could see his plan was somehow to connect the stranger to the equipment. She could not see how this might be done, with an organic.

"You're an artificial too then, aren't you Aliaah?" the stranger said. "That's what Aliaah means in fact, Artificial Life One."

Aliaah said nothing, except took the stranger's wrists and pulled the cable around to begin attaching it.

"This is going to sound so silly," the stranger said.

Aliaah gave him a curious look, but ignored his comment and continued with what he was doing.

"But this box junction here," the stranger continued. "This is what feeds your power to the ship. This is how you control Alice and the others. Something so ridiculously simple; that could so easily go wrong."

"Only if someone interferes with it," Aliaah said. "And there is only you. And you are within my control."

"You will kill him," said Alice, to Aliaah. "You cannot connect him. He is an organic."

"Perhaps; it is difficult to care," Aliaah said. "So then we take his key and bring the TARDIS on-line instead. Either or." Aliaah stopped what he was doing and looked up angrily at Alice. "What business is it of yours anyway?"

Alice let go of the stranger's wrists and pushed Aliaah onto his back.

The stranger began to bolt for the TARDIS, but Aliaah snapped out a hand and caught him and then the two men were grappling on the floor. Alice watched in horror. She could no longer tell which of them was which.

Beyond them, Ali Baba was beginning to recover his senses. Alice saw him nudge Ali G and the two artificials climbed to their feet.

She had to do something.

"Doctor!" she cried. "What can I do?"

The stranger and Aliaah continued their struggle on the ground, and Ali G and Ali Baba were stalking towards them.

"You can *not* call me Doctor for a start!" one of the two men gasped, and Alice snatched up one of the cables and stuffed it hard into the back of the other man's head.

There was a huge crackle of discharging electricity, and the one that had been Aliaah began to writhe about in eccentric agony. As Alice watched, his human features melted away, leaving only a mask of electronic circuitry.

"Don't look now," said the stranger, and Alice glanced up to see Ali G and Ali Baba very much still approaching them. She backed away, to the wall, to the junction point.

She looked down again at the stranger, nursing his elbow and trying to sit up.

"What's the thing called, that expression you make?" Alice asked.

"What expression?"

"The one where your mouth turns up at the corners?"

"It's called a smile," the Doctor said.

Alice smiled.

And pulled the plug.

The stranger stood in the middle of the cavernous space and saw the inside of the spaceship for the first time. It was cold and lifeless, empty of anything that might have saved him.

Banks of instruments and rows of terminals lined the walls, each one as dark and disused as the last. The stranger felt a chill run up his spine and realised the atmosphere was thinning out. Death was returning to the vessel.

He looked down, and saw a clutter of broken parts scattered before him.

"Alice."

Picking up one of the pieces, he turned it over in his hand.

"If I was still a Doctor..." he said, and the expression was still hanging there unfinished, long after he had entered the TARDIS and disappeared in search of new wrongs to right.

II. Corsair

Down the Spine of Malfannette's Column and through the Schism Of Antrelles *The Battered Bride* sailed, warping, vworping and sub-existing, bathed in the strawberry light of the vortex, phasing forth and back along the impossible flow of all time and space, the tides of chronology, canonicity and causality lashing against its side. The size of a wood-crate, and the features of such, it hid its cargo well. And its passengers even moreso.

"You call this thing a TARDIS?" the Man in the Bandolier barked incredulously from his perch around the antiquarian console, as they shook and rocked from the turbulence "I've had better trips on a donkey!"

The Corsair laughed, tossing back his long blonde hair, and toggled a switch on his side of the clumpy, worn cuboid console.

"I suppose you think yours'd be a whole lot better, do ya'?" the Corsair asked.

"Well," replied the Man in the Bandolier, his voice straining to be heard over the din of the vortexial storm, "Last time I checked, mine was a Type Forty. This is a... a..?"

"Type Twenty Eight," the Corsair said, grabbing one of the overhanging safety straps as his craft made a sudden lurch to both 760 degrees north-west and 10,000BCE simultaneously. "First and last of the line. Had to be discontinued after her consciousness circuits developed an empathy fault and she eloped with a Type Twenty-Six. Both of them slipped off. Three thousand relative years in the time vortex. That's one hell of a honeymoon. When they found her, she was in a right state."

"Hmmm, I see." The Man in the Bandolier smiled knowingly, as if recalling some happy memory "Hence the name..."

"*The Battered Bride*" the Corsair said proudly, patting the console. "Old girl still thinks she's going to find her beloved out here."

The Ship groaned mournfully as if in response.

"Bless" said the Corsair and, pulling out a stop on the underside of the chronal-fluxomitron, inserted what looked like a foil-covered chocolate coin into the slot. The Man in the Bandolier stared at his old friend. How he'd changed since the old days. How soft he had become. The Tattoo was still in place, sure. As it always had been. But this incarnation

of the Corsair had lost all the strong, powerful and persuasive femininity of his previous body. But that was to be expected. That Corsair, the raven-haired, dark-skinned Time Lady of almost an almost infinite intellectual prowess when it came to matters of temporal manoeuvre and strategy had been a *peacetime* Corsair and had died in the early days of the war. In her place was this one: a reckless, risk-taking waistcoated adventurer with a 'devil-may-care' attitude to the War and all they were dealing with. More like a pirate or a mercenary than a Warrior. Of course, the Man in the Bandolier knew all this to be an act, a front; a way of dealing with the realities of the War.

We all do that, he thought.

But sometimes we change too much. He sighed and, taking the hipflask concealed in the pocket of the long black coat he'd inherited from his predecessor, unscrewed the top and took a long, thirsty gulp. The stainless steel *ever ready* had been a gift from Jeffrey Bernard. Despite its age, the surface of the flask was unblemished, unscuffed and the Man in the Bandolier could see his reflection in it. A young-old face, elfin like, framed by a mop of unruly deep brown hair; prominent ears poking out from under the unwashed curls like fins on an Atlantean Fish Person.

"Where *is* your TARDIS anyway?" asked the Corsair.

"Warisia." the Man in the Bandolier replied. "Where we're heading."

"We are? I thought we were to meet the fleet at Dark Horizon?"

"That's what you were told, Corsair." his friend replied. "The real mission is to stop the fall of Warisia. There are Dalek squadrons already there. Sleeper cells ready to act."

"Warisia, though. Why there? I mean: to what end?"

The Man in the Bandolier handed the Corsair his hipflask.

"Have a drink, old friend," he said. "Ever hear tell of the Battle Of Infinite Regress?"

The Corsair looked at his companion quizzically.

"Well of course I have." he replied. "I wrote a paper on it. But it's a myth, a legend. A Time Lord fairytale."

"No." said the Man in the Bandolier. "It's real. It happened. Or, rather, it will happen. We're on our way to Warisia where the Battle Of Infinite Regress begins."

The colour drained from the Corsairs face. He took a long swig from the hipflask and then another. The Battle Of Infinite Regress. Also known as 'The Slaughter Repetition'. He held it out, returning it to his friend.

"Keep it," the Man in the Bandolier said. "You're going to need it more than I."

"How'd you know?" asked the Corsair.

The Man in the Bandolier stared into his friends eyes, a steady unwavering gaze that betrayed no emotion whatsoever.

"You asked me where my TARDIS was. I told you it was on Warisia. The truth, Corsair, is that I've been fighting this battle, *the* battle for quite some time now. I've seen what happens and I know what will happen. This isn't the first time we've had this conversation."

The Corsair stepped back, involuntarily.

"You've lied to me." he said. "After all we've been through."

The Man in the Bandolier took a deep breath.

"I haven't lied, Corsair. I've been trying to save you. To save Warisia. To save the millions of innocents who will be slaughtered or erased from history or never born at all. To save all those Time Lords from committing acts of such gross violence and violation that, by the end, even the Warisians after decades... centuries of Dalek terror, will welcome the Daleks as their leaders."

The Battered Bride lurched again, causing both men to grasp the safety straps.

"You tampered with the controls," the Corsair shouted over the noise of the ship creaking and groaning as it hit a jagged Dating Condundrum Buffer caught in the rough inner-crescent of the time vortex slipstream. "You reset the co-ordinates without me noticing."

"No," the other man replied, his voice hoarse. "The ship – your TARDIS, the Battered Bride – was always going to Warisia. Those co-ordinates were programmed centuries ago while she was lost out there in the vortex. During her 'honeymoon'. She'd been involved in the War. That's where I first found her. Why else do you think she's in the state she is?"

"So." the Corsair yelled above the din. "This whole thing has been manipulated by you since the start. There was never any choice."

The Battered Bride slipped out of the vortex and into a patch of silent, tranquil space. The rattling, the shaking, the buffering and the banging stopped. The only sound to be heard inside the ship was the beeping of an indicator on the console signalling that they had arrived in Warisian space.

The Man in the Bandolier stroked his chin.

"There is a choice, Corsair." he said finally. "A very simple one. We are here to make sure that the Battle Of Infinite Regress never happens. That the slaughter is averted. That time is rewritten. That it stays a myth, a legend."

"Well why hasn't that worked before, Doctor?" the Corsair said, and the Man in the Bandolier flinched.

"A very good question." he replied. "And one I don't have a satisfactory answer for. And I can't promise there won't be horror and bloodshed. We will still have to fight. And we will still suffer great losses. It's going to be hard on all of us."

The console beeped again; a different indicator. The Corsair went over to consult it.

“Seven hundred Battle TARDISes have just materialised alongside us.” he said. The Man in the Bandolier smiled.

“I’ve diverted them from Dark Horizon. I hacked them.” he said. “You see, the reason I’m sure it will work this time, Corsair, is because I think I’m getting very good at being a warrior. Very good indeed.”

The Man in the Bandolier stepped over to the console and pulled on an old and rusty lever.

“Ready?” he asked the Corsair.

The Corsair nodded.

“Good.” the Man in the Bandolier said. “And just one thing.”

“Yes?”

“If you want come out of this alive, never call me ‘Doctor’ again.”

The Ambassador From Wolf-Rayet 134

by Kate Orman

Art by Carolyn Edwards

The Time Lords were so kind that the Ambassador thought she might scream. A team of them fussed over her, checking that the temperature was not too high and the light was not too red and that her food was sufficiently salty. Yes, she assured them over and over, the floor of the conference building they had modified for her was perfectly comfortable. After the long journey from Mutter's Spiral, all she wanted to do was rest.

At last she managed to get rid of them. She lay on the floor of her suite, closed her five eyes, switched on the soft x-ray lamp, and let its soothing warmth sink into her segments. Aaah. At last a break from being pounded by the Time Lords' constant temporal emanations - burning and tanging brighter than the light of her homeworld's star. Even her lengthy desensitisation training only helped filter out some of the kaleidoscoping patterns of time energy.

Their courtesy wasn't just maddening, it was unnecessary. Gallifrey had plenty of time-sensitive species they could make their allies. Whereas the Lobopods' only chance of surviving the War was to side with the Time Lords.

At the heart of the Lobopods' star was a natural rift in time. Their ancestors, predators in the shallow waters, had evolved the ability to see the world line of their prey: the long, wiggling worm formed by an object's movement through space-time. Normally, that line only moved in one direction, steadily forwards towards the future – but a Lobopod could trace it backwards as well, an invaluable skill when fighting a time-travelling enemy. The Ambassador had been trained to give the precise coordinates where, for example, a Dalek scout ship would rematerialise after a time-jump, so that Time Lord forces could be waiting for it.

Lying half-curled on the floor, alone and light-years from home, the Ambassador knew she was ready to give everything for her world. At least now, she thought, I can have a few hours' rest before I have to face the War Councillors.

But she could not rest. She had been crammed into one of their space-time vehicles alongside its crew of six for almost a whole day. Then the diplomatic welcome, and her

flock of attendants - and the shock of Gallifrey itself, its constant traffic of TARDISes, its population of countless millions and their dazzling world lines!

Her brains (one for each eye) simply would not shut down. As if one of her ancestors had stuffed too many shellfish into its mouth, her mind had to chew through and digest that huge mass of input. It was like trying to watch hundreds of movies at once. She retracted her eyes into her carapace and whimpered.

By the time they came to take her to the conference chamber, she felt like a piece of dried-up seaweed.

Give me a few days, she wanted to say to them. Just give me a little time to refresh my energy and I'll be ready to address the War Councillors and start work on our treaty of mutual aid.

But every day, every *hour* the Daleks were carving new territory out of the galaxies. Temporal sensitives were high on their list of their priority targets - at least three Wolf-Rayet stars were known to have gone prematurely supernova already. Her people couldn't afford any delay.

She took a headache pill and, following her attendants, squeezed through the corridors to the conference chamber.

She started to panic when she began to sense just how many Time Lords and their allies were present in the chamber. Hundreds of time travellers' world lines, ceaselessly wriggling like burning worms. She and her attendants waited in a little anteroom near the stage. They couldn't provide an x-ray lamp for her here, though they had laid on salt water. She dropped her proboscis into the tank and drank thirstily. There was video from the conference being played on a screen, and people were talking, but she couldn't make sense of any of it. Her head was full of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, lifetimes, centuries, millennia, aeons, galactic years –

"I will step outside the room for a moment," the Ambassador told her attendants. "No! There's no need for all of you to accompany me! I wish just to gather my thoughts together."

Outside, the Ambassador found herself moving a little further away from the chamber... why did the halls have to be so narrow... and then a little further... and the people squeezing past her on either side...

She would go mad. The thought struck her like a comet. If she went into that chamber, her mind would go into its shell and never, never come back out again. No, she told herself, pull yourself together! Your trainers did so many tests and calculations to prove you can handle this situation... but what if they were wrong?

Her attendants were emerging from the antechamber, calling after her, concerned.

She started to run, as best she could manage on dry land and in high gravity. She

struck one of the walls and pushed herself off it. Everything was spinning.

There was an obstacle in the hallway in front of her. She barely noticed it until she was almost on top of it. It was a Time Lord, but somehow different to the others, she realised, her eyes swivelling together to focus on him –

- the infinite tangle of his world line - like fireworks exploding like in her eyes - a thousand years of loops and knots and coils – like supernovas bursting inside her brains -

The Ambassador screamed, ran into the wall, flipped over onto her back, and lay still as death.

She had been conscious for a while before she knew it, some of her brains waking up before the others. Wherever she was, it was almost completely silent. Oh, the bliss! She didn't move or open her eyes at first – she didn't want to break the spell. There was temporal noise here, but it was distant, like a calm sea heard from the bottom of a lagoon.

Had they sent her home? The thought snapped her back into full awareness. Oh, no – despite all the training and preparation, she'd had some sort of seizure, and the whole mission had been cancelled!

All five eyes popped open. She was inside a very large room, with walls so distant and so softly curving they were difficult to make out. Gentle off-white light came from somewhere. It was rather, thought the Ambassador, like being on the inside of an enormous egg.

She had never seen anything like this on her homeworld. Was she still on Gallifrey after all? For a moment she thought, *perhaps I've died and this is heaven*, but then she told herself to be sensible and take a proper look around.

A little distance away, sitting on the floor, was the Time Lord she had all but run over. He gave her a polite nod to acknowledge that she was now awake. She flinched, involuntarily, her eyestalks retracting into her carapace; but the raging temporal pandemonium he'd been surrounded by was now only a warbling hum.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked.

She poked one eye out to look at him, warily. "Are you a doctor?"

He said, "I was worried you might dry out and go into hibernation. But I can assure you there's been no physical damage."

"Your Excellency," she said, "where are we?"

"Your Excellency! Good grief, don't call me that." His muted world line told her he had not been wearing this body long, but his face already showed signs of wear. He wore battered clothes instead of Citadel robes, and dark lenses over his eyes. "This-" he gestured around- "is called a Zero Room. It's an application of our dimensional technology. Right now you and I are cut off from the rest of the universe altogether. Restful, isn't it?"

A little distance away, sitting on the floor, was the Time Lord she had all but run over.

"But we're here together," she said. "Why can I barely sense your world line?"

"There's an invisible barrier between us," he said. "A simple temporal shield."

The Ambassador squinted with three of her eyes, but she couldn't see anything. She uncoiled her proboscis and reached out with it. "I'm not sure you should –" the Doctor began, but at that moment, her claw kissed the force field.

The wall of energy sparked in the extreme ultraviolet, dazzling her, and sent an aching shock into her mouth and right through her entire body. She retracted her eyes, reared up at the wall, and smacked her claw against it, furiously, again and again, hitting it with all the pain and fatigue and frustration of the last day.

When she felt calmer, and less like one of her primitive ancestors charging into battle, she put her eyes out again. The Time Lord was still there, but he was rather further away.

"I apologise," she said. "But if you had this technology at your disposal all this time, *why was it necessary for me to collapse* –" She took a deep breath, ' - before it was made available to me?'

The wall of energy sparked in the extreme ultraviolet, dazzling her

"For all our brilliance," he admitted, "sometimes we Time Lords have less common sense than the average goose." He came close to the wall and sat down again. "You see, I visited your planet when I was still a young man. My world line was a lot less of a dog's breakfast then! That's why I recognised at once what was happening to you"

The Ambassador retracted three of her eyes at the memory of running away down the corridor. "I've got to get back to the conference," she said.

"Do you have any idea how long-winded the average Time Lord is? Put your lobes up for a while. Go and be bored rigid when you're good and ready."

"There's no time to lose!" said the Ambassador. "Without an alliance the Lobopods can't survive, but now I've revealed our weakness to the War Council. The talent that makes us valuable to you also makes it incredibly difficult to work with you – even to be in the same room with you."

"Weakness?" said the Doctor. "On the contrary. You've demonstrated the most extraordinary strength." The Ambassador swivelled her eyes to focus on him. Surely this was nothing more than bare-faced flattery? But he went on: "This is no ordinary War. Once

you enter it, you'll find there's no exit. You've proved that you've got grit, Ambassador. The courage and determination to keep going, despite what it was costing you."

She clenched her proboscis. "Please tell me this wasn't some sort of a test."

"Good heavens, no! No, to be absolutely honest with you, the whole thing was my fault. I knew a Wolf-Rayet sensitive was coming. I ought to have thought to say something to someone." He let out a long sigh. "I'm truly sorry that I didn't."

The Ambassador pulled her proboscis in and said, "As long as we can rest in one of these Zero Rooms now and again, the Lobopods will be able to give you all our cooperation."

"I'm very glad to hear it. This isn't just a war between the Daleks and the Time Lords. It's a war between the Daleks and every other form of life. At the end of this war one side, and only one side, will still be left. For the sake of the universe, it has to be ours. Which means the Time Lords can't have everything our own way. We have to make some compromises too."

He lifted the lenses from his eyes for a moment, long enough to give her a wink. She realised he was wearing them to protect his eyes from the temporal shield's radiation.

The Ambassador pulled herself onto to all thirty of her lobes. "I'm ready to address the War Councillors now," she said.

"Oh," said the Doctor, "you already have been, Ambassador. Or one of them, anyway. On behalf of the Time Lords, welcome to the War."

The Amber Room

by Simon Brett and John Davies

This certainly wasn't what he'd anticipated when he'd woken up that morning.

Basically, death wasn't quite panning out in the way that Leo Dunning had been expecting. If the stories about seeing your life flash before your eyes had held any water, then he would have at least expected a flash of that life-altering memory from the glorious summer holiday when Donna Kimble gave him the honour of looking up her skirt. But there'd been none of that. No warning. Suddenly, all the air was sucked out of the world, and something had grabbed him, snatching him from a routine patrol on the platoon's perimeter and placing him down in an altogether different crisis.

Thoughts of landmines, snipers, IED's, even embolisms and freak natural occurrences came to Leo as possible causes of his demise. But he didn't dwell too long on them as he ran for his life through gaps in boulders, stopping with his back pressed against one particularly large and flat moss-covered protrusion to gain a breath. He tried to figure out exactly *where* he was and *why* exactly he was no longer a soldier in the British army on his last tour of duty.

There was an almighty, earth-shaking roar and then Leo Dunning ran for his life some more.

If he *was* running for his life? Was this a new life, or the same life? And if it was a different life, could he die in this life or would life carry on regardless? It struck Leo that not only was he never going to see his wife again or meet his new-born son; he was about to be hunted and eaten by, what he could only assume was, a prehistoric monster. He'd always hoped that if he were to die as a soldier, there was at least a good chance that he would know nothing about it. That it'd all be over in a flash. Well ... that is what he'd hoped. But this? This was too much information on every level.

"This is it!" he said aloud. "This is death?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but this isn't your time." said the voice that accompanied a swift and controlled grip on his left wrist.

Dressed in a long, weathered leather jacket, the dark haired man led Leo quickly through the undergrowth to a nearby cave. Meanwhile, the creature's roars grew quieter,

subsiding into the distance.

"I do believe," the man said, "an animal from your zone was dropped just over that ridge at the same time as you. Lucky for you - not so lucky for the mule."

Leo could now see that the man was possibly in his mid-forties, a thin, gaunt Caucasian face with a mop of dark, slightly greying hair, completing a slender frame. A jacket hung on his coat hanger form as if waiting patiently for the moment when its owner might "grow into it." A bandolier, holding strange tools, strung across his battered antiquarian waistcoat, labelling this as the most unlikely of warriors. His thin legs were wrapped and strapped in combat stained fatigues. Leo began to feel almost sorry for this man, so obviously out of his depth, until, in a moment, his eyes finally met the stranger's. In that moment, all doubt dissipated. The man tilted his head to motion Leo to follow him, and he did so without question. Leo sensed that the man's eyes had seen more combat and bloodshed than the whole of his platoon a hundred times over.

The eyes. The answer was always in the eyes. And then he saw the Police Box.

An hour passed, filled with brief and clipped explanations about 'chrono decrement' and 'temporal shrapnel' leaving Leo to look for his own answers amongst the strange circular control room of the craft that was, apparently, going to take him home.

"There's very little point in me telling you all about the TARDIS as you won't be traveling with her for long." the man said, his voice gravelly, clipped and deep. An officer's voice. "Can't even be sure how long you'll be alive for once you're back where you're supposed to be, but ... well, you'll soon be back where you're supposed to be. I can promise you that."

"So ... I got bounced into prehistoric times?"

"Yes. But now I'm taking you back."

"That was a dinosaur chasing me."

"Yes, but forget about that. You're nearly home."

"So I'm not dead."

"No, not yet." the man said, waving his hand "But there's still time."

The stranger pulled a lever to his right. A juddering grew from a gentle vibration to a full shake, powerful enough to make the central pillar of the machine start to creak with tension as it moved up and down.

"You poor thing" he said, looking up with concern at the pillar. "I must grease your chambers. What is it, old girl?"

As the shaking increased, the man reached for another lever, pulling it hard against the tremors that seemed to threaten the integrity of the ship, eventually bringing the noise to a stop.

"That's odd. Very odd." he said, stroking his beard. He turned to Leo. "Where were you just before you found yourself being chased by the Allosaurus?"

"The Allo … ?" Leo began, but then decided it wasn't worth it. "Like I told you, I was on patrol in Baghdad."

"Baghdad, Earth wasn't it?" the man replied, his eyes serious, his gaze steady. "Then you're very lucky. To be displaced in time and not in space is a minor miracle. Normally I could have just shifted the TARDIS a few hundred quick millennia to get you home. But because of the War and the fact that I'm trying to keep Earth safe, a straight line through the vortex is all too detectable, and we would have been shot out of the sky the moment we materialised."

Leo just shook his head. This was not the war he trained for. The stranger circled the controls of his ship, muttering under his breath, until he settled upon a small panel of buttons not dissimilar to a keyboard. With a whirring sound, a panel rose from the control deck and sparked into life.

"My god," the man said, his voice a stunned whisper. He punched in a few of the keys, and the small monitor screen above the console lit up. It showed an empty black star-scape. The man, his face grave and ashen, looked at the screen. "It can't be."

"What is it?" asked Leo.

"The Earth" he said, turning to the soldier, "It's gone."

"Gone?" said Leo. "How can it be gone? Perhaps you've gone back instead of forward... or something."

"That's not what I mean." the man said quietly. "Gone as in 'never existed'. This is what I'd been trying to protect against. What I thought I had ... ."

He placed his hands on the console, shoulders hunched, head drooped. Leo was disturbed by the deep, shocking sound that came from the man. A crying jag cut off as quickly as it had begun.

"Are you alright?" Leo asked. He watched as the man straightened up immediately, as if suddenly remembering he wasn't alone. When he turned around, Leo saw the red around his eyes, the colour drained from a face frozen in grief. But in a split second this transformed into another expression: eyebrow raised quizzically, mouth in a tight smile.

"We have got ourselves into an almighty mess, haven't we?" he said.

After ten minutes silence, and a good amount of watching the man circling the controls of his strange machine, Leo decided to broker the peace. In the midst of all this confusion, he needed to grasp and cling onto some sort of normality, some level of familiarity. He reached for the one thing that all humans need to start forming a bond with someone else, however superficial.

"Can you tell me your name?"

"Can you tell me yours?" the man said, not looking up, flicking switches and pressing buttons. "I would hope that you can still remember it, because to all intents and purposes it's the name of the only human in existence. I should look after it if I were you. Keep it somewhere safe."

"I asked first."

"Did you now? Well, somehow I think you should keep that unique head of yours focused on what it knows already, rather than looking for new things to confuse it. You being here is important. That you are *still* here is extraordinary. Some point time will catch up with you. Not quite sure why it hasn't already. You shouldn't exist and, theoretically, the TARDIS should have filtered you out the moment we arrived here. But she didn't. A minor miracle? No, the TARDIS doesn't do miracles. But a paradox ? Yes – one that may buy me some time to figure out what's going on"

"Can you get the Earth back?"

"I don't know. Can something come back that never went away in the first place? Because it *never existed*." the stranger said, and turned his attention to the monitor screen. "Another paradox. And, believe me, this war has seen more paradoxes than you've seen … Police Boxes."

"Police Boxes?" said Leo. "I've only see the one today …"

"Correction," said the stranger, flicking a switch on the monitor so that the image was now projected onto the control room wall.

Leo took in the image. "I stand corrected," he said. He had now seen two Police Boxes in one day. A blue box, floating motionless in space upside down in relation to the monitor. Leo half expected it to be slowly rotating like some stranded spaceman, but no. It was just... there. For some unknown reason, Leo found the image reassuring. And then, in a split second, he knew why. On a day that had involved travelling millions of years into Earth's past and being hunted by an Allosaurus, only to be kidnapped by a mad spaceman, some kind of... *continuity* was welcome relief. This was it. His comfortable appreciation of the object took on a more sombre feeling when he reasoned that this Police Box was the only evidence, apart from himself, that the Earth had ever existed.

Pushing the sobering thought aside, Leo focussed on the there and then.

"Is it another one of these things?" asked Leo, "Is this part of a... fleet of Police Boxes?"

"Don't be silly. As if anyone would purposely make their time capsule look like a Police Box. Unless … ." The stranger tapped into his control panel. "No. I... don't think so," he muttered, staring at the monitor in dread. It was a look Leo instinctively didn't like - this seasoned warrior was troubled. And if that was the case, the outlook was bleak.

Somehow Leo found the energy to try and lighten the mood. He had been a valued member of his platoon, vital at times to the morale of the group. In the midst of the

most unspeakable horrors he gained a reputation for still being able to get the men calm, focussed, unified and, from time to time, laughing when laughter was the last thing on their mind.

"Can I at least call you something? Marty? John? Dave..?"

"Dave?" said the stranger; his eyebrows raised high in incredulity. His brow lowered into a grimace and he turned back to the ship's controls. "Well, I suppose if it makes you feel better. I haven't had a name in a long, long time. So Dave it'll have to be. For convenience's sake" He turned back to the console, pausing briefly to mutter 'Dave' again, shaking his head. Leo fancied he caught the briefest of tiny smiles. But the moment passed and soon Dave's hands moved quickly over the switches.

"Don't you want to know my name, Dave?" said Leo, but Dave had already made his way around to the other side of the central column and was lost in concentration. The same grinding noise that had accompanied the ship's take off from prehistoric times returned.

"I wouldn't stand there if I were you," said Dave, and Leo ran to his companion's side. The shape of a blue Metropolitan Police Box began to take form where he had stood.

Dave slowly circled the object, periodically tapping at its sides, a hollow knock greeting his actions. Once he returned to the front of the box he reached into his pocket for a small tool that he pointed at the lock. There was a brief high pitched buzz and Leo heard the sound of the door unlocking. Dave gave the door a nudge and it gave way immediately, revealing darkness from within.

"It's just a normal Police Box!" said Leo. A few hours ago he only had a vague notion of what a Police Box actually was, let alone of a spacecraft disguised as one, bigger on the inside.

"Of course it's a normal Police Box!" said Dave. "I was hardly going to materialise around another TARDIS, was I? Tried it once - never again. I'm still finding fish in the swimming pool. And I already checked as to whether it was the same Police Box. It isn't. Had it been so, we'd be worrying about swimming pools in the swimming pool"

Shaking his head, with no idea of what Dave was talking about, Leo sat himself cross-legged in the base of the box. He touched its sides with the palm of his hand, desperate to feel something of the life he'd lost, savouring the feel of the grain on his fingertips and smelling the musty smell of disuse in its corners. Although he had not been away from Earth for that long in real terms, the news of its extinction and the close proximity of these textures and scents, things so innate to Earth, made him feel nostalgic. He found his mind drifting back, associating visual images to the sensory aspects provided by the Police Box. Personal images travelled into his mind, memories of damp prefabricated school buildings; carving his initials into a tree, the heavy coffin he carried on his shoulder when they had buried his grandfather. Although these recollections were tinged with sorrow, it was Earth sorrow and, in that moment, they were more than welcome.

"I wouldn't sit in there too long or you're likely to get a little … cranky."

Snapped back into reality, Leo jumped up and stepped out of the Police Box.

"Cranky?" he asked. "What's wrong with it? Radioactive?"

"Yes. Of a sort" replied Dave. "It's reeking of Dalek temporal radiation."

"Dalek?" Leo said. "What's 'Dalek'?"

"The enemy." replied Dave. "Just as I thought. This thing has been caught up in some kind of ICE."

"Which is?"

"Impact Causal Event. Or, put simply, a time bomb. The Daleks have got a time weapon - on a massive scale."

"And that blew the Police Box into space?"

"Quite the opposite. I'd say this thing was at the centre of the event and everything around it was removed from time itself. So, no, it wasn't blown into space. This Police Box is where and when it's always been," Dave said carefully. "It's just that everything else has gone. At least, for the moment."

"You can get it back?" said Leo.

"Well you're here, and it's here," said Dave. "So I think that gives us a little hope. More importantly, if I do manage to figure out how to get the earth back to where it was, how the hell do we stop the Daleks using it again? They've broken through the Chronosmiths' protection matrix. That's troubling."

Leo circled the centre console, lost for purpose and waiting patiently for some word from Dave as to what was going to happen next. The stranger sat on the floor, staring at the Police Box, saying nothing, until eventually, "Ah! Oh..."

"What? What is it, Dave?"

"We have a problem."

"Will I understand it?"

"Probably not."

"Try me?"

"You have more hope than I, soldier." Dave sighed. "Imagine, if you will, a big explosion. But at its centre, where it hits, it's more like the eye of a storm. Calm. This Police Box was there. Possibly even the target. The box was at the epicentre of the ICE that wiped Earth from history. A paradox of sorts, but the release of so much energy from this point has created a pocket of temporal flux allowing the box to exist on every possible timeline all at once. It exists, but doesn't. At a fixed point in space and time. On every possible timeline."

Leo nodded. He understood. At least, he thought he did.

"You're safe while you're in the heart of the storm, yes?"

"Yes." Dave nodded. "But when the whirlwind passes over what happens?"

"It drops everything on top of you."

"Exactly. A whole new timeline dropped on the universe. Right at this point. At this place."

"Fantastic. So the whirlwinds have dropped a reality on top of us in which the Earth never existed. Except for this Police Box."

"Exactly, soldier." Dave replied. " If we try to leave, we lose the only chance of rescuing the Earth. I materialised my ship around this, the final remnant of Earth and if we move even a millimetre, it's lost forever"

He continued to stare at the box. Leo continued to pace the room, the sound of his boots on the floor the only noise heard above the hum of machinery. With a jolt Leo stopped pacing and turned to face the stranger. Something had occurred to him. A not very pleasant something.

"They were after you weren't they?" he said. "That's why they bombed the blue box! You got us into this!"

"Somehow I think the enemy can tell the difference between a wooden box and a dimensionally transcendental time capsule. They never miss."

"Well Dave, you couldn't. At least, not until you looked closer."

"Looked closer? Looked ... closer!" The stranger jumped to his feet, eyes blazing with excitement, his voice ecstatic. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Soldier, I think you have something there! Point one: I see another Police Box floating in space - I'm curious. Point Two: I need to look closer. I realise it's not another TARDIS and I bring it on board. Point Three: Once my TARDIS is in contact with the paradox object I can't move. Point Four: the Daleks never miss."

"It was a trap?"

"It was a trap."

Dave moved back to the control panel, this time lifting a section revealing an array of round cogs. He punched at them, closed the panel and tapped a long stream of digits into the ship's computer. Once again, the grinding noise returned, this time accompanied by a high pitched shriek and rumble: the sound of ancient stone against ancient stone. Leo looked across the room to see the Police Box fade from view.

"You did it!" he said. "We've moved!"

"Not quite. We've moved, but the box hasn't. While I can't remove the ship from its position around the anomaly, I can however rearrange the rooms within my ship. The Police Box is now elsewhere within the TARDIS."

"Where exactly?" asked Leo.

Dave shrugged. “Haven’t the foggiest. But we had better go and find it. Good job you’re in sturdy boots, soldier. This could be a long walk.”

Leo followed Dave from the console room and into a long corridor. He frowned. Okay, it was lengthy, but surely it wasn’t long enough to be concerned with his footwear...

Several hours and an interminable number of corridors later, Leo finally saw the point. This craft was huge. Impossibly huge. He found this notion both fascinating and rather unnerving. While the technology could have housed continents or even planets, it had possibly been to so many places and met so many civilisations and creatures that who knew if some had stowed away? Would they turn a corner and encounter a wandering alien? Would opening a door release a crazed human who had gone insane wandering the corridors and sought refuge behind a door it could control, that it could lock? Leo banished his thoughts and marched, or rather trudged, on.

Eventually, the trek led them to an ornate door, elegantly framed by scroll carvings and figures which looked a little like angels to Leo’s eyes.

“This... is the Amber Room.” said Dave, “Go on, open it.”

“Me?” replied Leo.

“Allow me this small amount of theatricality,” said Dave, looking to the ceiling.

Leo reached for the handle at the door’s centre. It seemed Victorian in style, an ornate scroll effect handle with a smooth, spherical piece of amber at its end. A small butterfly-like creature was suspended at its centre. He pressed down hard, and the door released itself from its frame, almost opening of its own accord. As if it *wanted* to be opened. Quelling his fears, Leo summoned up his instinctual training, and his trademark levity.

“After me, I presume.”

Dave raised an eyebrow. “Well, since you volunteered I’d hate for your display of valour at the prospect of going into a perfectly safe room to go to waste.”

Leo entered the room, Dave only a few steps behind him. The Police Box sat in the centre of what was, rather disappointingly, a nondescript room. Cats eye-like fittings were sunken into the floors and walls, dotted periodically along every surface.

“We have one chance at sorting this mess out,” said the stranger. “If we can find out exactly when the impact occurred, we may be able to navigate along the appropriate course back through time to try and intercept the explosion. A map of sorts leading us back to when this box became more than just a box.”

“What we need is a black box, rather than a blue box,” said Leo.

Dave opened a hatch on the wall and placed a tool from his pocket into an appropriate hole in the enclosed control panel. “Not a bad analogy, soldier. Every object

has its time in reality, and every object has a story. It carves its shape through space and time. The Amber Room lets us see the wound that it's left behind."

Opening a second hatch in the floor, Dave pulled a collection of organic looking cables from their hiding place, and proceeded to place their terminals in strategic points on the Police Box. There was a familiar whirring noise and a deep pulse of energy boomed through the room. Synchronized flashes of light pulsed from each of the cats eyes. Slowly, a translucent white light emerged from each point in the room - at first with a fluorescent glow, but growing into a pulsating golden haze.

Slowly the strands of orange mist began to splinter and solidify, each tendril spreading and flattening until circular areas roughly two metres wide filled the air. Each zone was connected to the other by faint vein-like wisps of ether and, as the two men watched, they multiplied and overlapped, going back, deeper, adding depth to the projection. Leo looked at the stranger, the man he had christened Dave, as his lively eyes danced, urging the process on. And noticed a self-congratulatory smile as images began to form within each and every area, transforming them into portals into time. The time leading up to the moment the bomb had detonated.

The light surrounding them grew to a point where Leo felt the need to shield his eyes. Dave simply surveyed the area, looking for detail in the fluorescent canvas. Eventually Dave gently moved Leo's hands from his eyes. He opened one eye and, realising that the light had subsided, he found the courage to open the other.

The room was altogether different. A strange feeling came over Leo as he realised that he was now standing in an English city street - London, judging by the red double decker bus passing by. Except ... except it *wasn't* passing by. It was standing stock still. As were a group of people spread throughout the tableau.

Leo's eyes focused on a handful of tiny fingers that looked somehow wrong. Blinking, he saw why. His eyes adjusted and saw that these were plastic, being held by a slightly larger pair of fingers: those of a little girl. In turn, the fingers on the little girl's other hand were being held by a woman, presumably her mother. Tied around the girl's wrist was a red ribbon and tethered to it was a simple, red balloon. Leo smiled as he saw the badge on her floral dress: Birthday Girl. According to the badge she had just turned five. For a moment he wondered if he would ever live to experience again one of his own child's birthdays...

Leo shifted his gaze, taking in the sad but all too familiar sight of a homeless man sat huddled, begging for money. Although the time display distorted his face slightly, Leo winced as he saw the sole of one of the tramps battered boots had a large, ugly hole in it, clearly eaten into it by hours, days, of walking the streets. A man with a similarly blurred face was leaning over him, a box in one hand, an empty plastic bag in the other. Leo found himself smiling again as he realised what was playing out here. The man was donating a new pair of shoes to the homeless man. Judging by the box they were a pair of size 9 brogues.

"Well, beggars can't be choosers." Leo heard Dave mutter. He also felt a tinge of

sadness as he took in this simple scene of humanity in action. For all our faults and our propensity for war, we humans were, and still are a kind and compassionate species. We – they - need to exist again. Between the two of them, he and Dave *had to* bring back Earth.

In another stationary moment in time Leo saw two young lads frozen in a run, nearing a woman. She looked startled. Was this an attack? Looking behind the woman he could make out a poster, a chart rundown, and the boys were pointing at specific titles. It was nothing untoward, simply youths spending their pocket money, but in that exuberant way that often shocked their elders.

Leo could have spent all day looking at the scenes before him. In it Earth still existed - and as more than merely his memories. It was simultaneously heartening and heart-breaking and, right at that moment, he wanted those conflicting bedfellows to be in his life.

"So, this is what it comes down to," said Dave. "All of time and space, and the future existence of Earth dependent upon one single instant of time. A snapshot of fish and chips... red balloons… chewing gum on streets...and red buses."

"Say what you like about time and space," said Leo, "but at this point in time, I'd swap the whole universe for a cup of tea."

"You may have a point there after all, soldier. Somewhere amongst the detail of this moment in time, is something that gives away the exact moment the bomb hit. If we can find that, then we'll have a clue to the set of co-ordinates that will give the TARDIS a clear path to the event horizon of the explosion. Then we might just have a chance of negating its effects. If it works the way I think it will. We have to hope that something surrounding the box can tell us when exactly this mess began."

"There's a newspaper in that guy's hand…"

"And if the newspaper is a day old?"

"There are a number of people wearing watches."

"Atomic watches?"

"I doubt it."sighed Leo.

The stranger rubbed his chin. He took a walk around the scene. *Through* the scene. Walking through the people, passing through them like a ghost. Except, Leo realised, it was they who were the ghosts. Then, after a few minutes he stopped. Clenched his fist and made a tight jab in the air.

"Of course!" he exclaimed, a smile overtaking his face. "Time, soldier. Time. You were transported through time. Time is my business. You are a metaphor. Not just the last surviving human. But evidence that while there's time, like life, there's hope."

"And help?" said Leo.

"Yes." the stranger replied and going over to a control panel on the wall, he punched a few buttons, then, with a flourish, slammed the control panel shut. He came over to Leo

and rested his hands lightly against his shoulders.

"I always did like humans," he said, kindly. The moment passed and he walked over to the time mural. "And this is time being helpful, despite all that we've done to her. This room, soldier. It's working *with* time, scraping the flakes of history from the Police Box to display a scene that will help us there. Using a wonderful, ordinary moment of a simple human everyday life and giving us details, data, co-ordinates."

Leo, as much as he tried, still couldn't see what Dave was getting at. He shrugged.

"Don't look too deep, soldier. Don't over-analyse it. Have a look at this scene and then tell me what you see. It is simple"

"Simple?"

The man nodded. "Let's see what we have, given in such plain sight. Almost child's play."

So Leo looked. Looked at what was right in front of him. Child's play...

"The girl's badge?" he said. "Fifth birthday badge?"

"Go on," said Dave., encouragingly. Look for a pattern."

"So... a five." said Leo. "The new shoes for the tramp. Size nine. In the window of that shop. The chart positions that are clearer that the others. That's a six and a one. How many co-ordinates do we need?"

"I think time will have ensured we only see the required amount, don't you? She is, after all, one step in front of us … and behind … and sometimes to the side."

Dave wandered over near to the tramp, and crouched onto his ankles, looking carefully.

"The bus! The London bus!" exclaimed Leo, running to the end of the room closest to the projection of the blurred vehicle. "That's the last number, yes? The number on the bus! Twenty-eight."

"Well, it could be." said Dave, digging at the projected gap between paving slabs in front of the tramp.

"Well is it?" said Leo

"No."

"No?"

"No." said Dave, still studying the tramp. "Go back a bit."

"You already know don't you?" exclaimed Leo. "You do, don't you? In fact, you've known for a while!"

Dave said nothing. His gaze fixed on the tramp or, rather, at the tramps shoes.

"Was it one of the numbers I found? Was it? It bloody was, wasn't it? Was it the

poster? No? The badge? The shoes - it was the bloody shoes."

"Well, yes" drawled Dave in his rich voice, a sly smile spread across his face "It was the shoes actually."

"New shoes; size nine? You can travel through space and time and save the Earth simply on the basis of the number nine?!"

"Don't be ridiculous, soldier." said Dave. "It is far more complicated than that."

"So what is it then?"

"The tramp is wearing *my* shoes."

"The tramp's … ?" Leo rounded on the scene in front of him, instantly comparing the footwear of the tramp, and the Time Lord sat next to him."You bastard!"

"I much preferred it when you called me 'Dave'" the stranger replied, as he got up and walked towards the Police Box that stood in the centre of the Amber Room's holographic projection. He reached up to just above the 'P' of the Police Box sign, and recovered an identical screwdriver to his own. He waggled them both at Leo, smiling.

"And 'Dave', being the clever Time Lord that he is, is about to save the Earth. And he's going to need your help."

3:02pm, London, England, planet Earth, January 12th, 1971

"Get away from that!" said the policeman, shooing away a homeless man from the Police Box. "They may be phasing these buggers out, but 'ave some bloody respect, you filthy sod."

Deftly leaving something just above the 'P' of the Police Box sign, the tramp quickly moved away from the box. He found a spot in front of a nearby wall and crouched down to a seated position against it. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a bag of sweets and settled down to watch the show. A pair of legs belonging to a man in a business suit passed in front of his eyes momentarily, and stood to the side, looking in the same direction.

"Is your screwdriver-thing in place?"

"Snug as a bug and sending out a signal stronger than 300 year old Androgum cheese. Strong enough for a nose-less homicidal mutant to sniff all the way from Skaro, and strong enough to lead a wayward TARDIS back to reality."

"Excellent. So there's no chance of the Daleks missing?"

"Logical creatures, Daleks. Blue box, humanoid with two hearts nearby, dirty great Gallifreyan signal transmitting outdated battle codes. I'd say they're winching their sights towards us at this very moment. What a trophy for the Emperor. Wipe out the Earth, and take a pot shot at the Daleks' greatest enemy at the same time."

"And what did you say would happen when they fire their weapon?"

“Well I think that now we’ve replaced the Police Box with the one that we found floating in space - which, incidentally, was simultaneously existing and not existing on every possible timeline at that point in space and history - it should, in theory, cancel out the effects of the weapon and hopefully take the weapon out at the same time. There’s only so much room for paradoxes round here, so something’s got to give. Give it five minutes and I doubt they’ll even remember inventing it.”

“Fantastic. Can I go home now?

“Momentarily.” the Time Lord said. “Just waiting for time to be rewritten. Takes it out of me, I’m older than I look. Do you mind if I continue to just sit down for a minute?”

“No,” said Leo “Not at all.”

Leo watched as the Time Lord shuffled his position on the pavement. He did look old. And sad. And weary. Wincing, Leo saw the sole of one of Dave’s battered boots had a large, ugly hole in it, clearly eaten into it by hours, days, of walking the streets.

“Dave.” said Leo, producing a shoebox from the bag he was carrying. “I got you these.”

The Celephas Gift

by Andrew Smith

The Sterrati were Dalek agents. The Doctor had suspected this from the start.

And now he was running through their ship, chased by the captain and his crew. They fired energy rounds that exploded off the walls and ceiling around him,

The presence of the Sterrati – renowned smugglers and blockade-runners - on Luminus Ultra, just as the Doctor had been looking for help to break the Dalek blockade of the planet, had been too much of a coincidence to be believed. But he had strung them along.

With their help the Doctor and the Luminal rebels had broken through the blockade. It had been a ruse, of course. The Sterrati had intended that the rebels would lead them to their allies' secret location in the neighbouring star system. After which the Sterrati would have reported that base to their Dalek masters.

The Doctor had turned the tables, crippling the Sterrati ships while the rebels continued on to safety.

And now the Sterrati were out for his blood.

The Doctor dared a brief look back down the corridor.

The Sterrati captain and his crew were moving fast for a species almost as wide as they were tall. They had feral hate in their eyes, and uttered angry, resonating, animalistic cries as they brought their guns up to the aim.

The Doctor ducked as a volley of rounds passed over his head. He barely kept his footing as the corridor turned sharply right. But then he looked ahead and smiled broadly.

In about a hundred metres the corridor opened up into a storage area. And sitting there waiting like an old friend was the TARDIS.

The Doctor dug the TARDIS key from his pocket as he ran. He reached his ship with the Sterrati lumbering ever closer, and stabbed the key into the lock.

An energy round hit the TARDIS door. The Doctor recoiled from the heat of the blast, and then he was grabbed from behind. The Sterrati captain threw him across the room, away from the TARDIS. The Doctor landed heavily on the deck and slid into the wall.

The other Sterrati covered the Doctor with their blasters as the captain lumbered over to him, picked him up, and pinned him against a floor-to-ceiling-window by his shoulders.

The captain leaned in close, curling back his lips to reveal four rows of jagged teeth, and gave a low, angry growl that finished in a snarl. The teeth snapped shut less than an inch from the Doctor's face.

"Prepare to die," the captain growled with relish. He looked at his crew, arranging his features into what looked like the practice of a smile. "I wonder what Time Lord tastes like?" The crew dutifully chuckled.

As the captain looked away, the Doctor reached into his coat and brought out his sonic screwdriver. It buzzed into life.

The captain looked down. "What you going to do with that?" he sneered.

"Let me go, or you'll find out." The Doctor sounded grimly determined. "I won't warn you again. Save yourselves. Let me go."

The captain looked briefly puzzled, even concerned, then uttered a staccato laugh. At the same time he closed an oversized, scaly hand on the Doctor's throat. "You're a funny man, Doctor. That thing ain't no weapon and you ain't scaring me. Now, die." His hand tightened.

The Doctor pressed the tip of the sonic screwdriver to the window and hit a control. The tone of the device increased in pitch.

Within seconds, web-like cracks were spreading rapidly across the surface of the inches-thick pressurized glass.

The Sterrati captain threw the Doctor away from the window. Too late. The sonic screwdriver had done its work. The window was about to fail.

"Get out!" the captain screamed to his people, but there was no time for that.

The window's entire surface was a crazed pattern of cracks. In an instant, it collapsed, breaking down and erupting outwards.

Suddenly it was as if there was a hurricane blowing, as all the air in the room vented into space.

The Captain grabbed hold of some piping on the wall to save himself. He hung on for dear life, and could only watch as two of his crew, too slow to get a handhold, were swept past him and out into space.

A klaxon sounded, and the captain saw a bulkhead door slam down across the entrance to the corridor, sealing this area from the rest of the ship. There was no way out now. He had minutes at most to live.

Above the cacophony of escaping air the captain heard the sound of the TARDIS doors opening. He snapped his head round to see the Doctor pulling himself over the

threshold into his ship.

The captain howled with bitter rage. This Time Lord would not survive if he and his men must die!

He snatched a photon grenade from his belt and pulled out the pin.

Entering the TARDIS, the Doctor ran to the console and slammed a lever forward. The doors swung shut, the engines rasped and heaved and whined, and the Doctor allowed himself to relax with a great outrush of breath as he leant forward, hands on the console, and dropped his head. He had made it. The TARDIS was in flight, leaving the Sterrati behind.

"He should have let me go," he said bitterly. He looked at his right hand. It was balled into a fist, the fingers digging into his palm. It shook, as if the hand was possessed with rage. It took a determined effort of will to make the fingers unfurl, and the fist became a hand again.

He was pondering this when he heard an unfamiliar metallic sound behind him.

Turning, he saw a small metal canister by his feet. It rolled across the floor as the TARDIS pitched in flight.

A Sterrati grenade.

A red light at one end of the grenade had been flashing. As the Doctor looked at it it became a solid, bright, angry beacon.

The Doctor instinctively kicked the canister into a far corner and dropped to the floor.

The explosion that followed an instant later was an eruption of sound, pressure and light that swept around the control room.

The console erupted with electrical explosions. Showers of sparks fountained from the control panels, at the same time as further explosions broke out from behind several of the roundels in the walls.

The Doctor, dazed and unsteady, disoriented and with his ears ringing, gripped the edge of the console and pulled himself up. He found his eyes were stinging from the smoke that was now filling the room. He made a swift assessment of the damage to the instruments in front of him and was relieved to see that the most vital controls were undamaged. He urgently input an emergency landing programme.

The engines rattled as they carried out the instrument command. There was a loud bang and the room juddered as the TARDIS made its landing.

Coughing, hardly able to see, the Doctor operated the door control then ran.

He threw himself through the opening doors, out of the increasingly toxic TARDIS interior and into … he had no idea what.

The Doctor ran out into almost total darkness and an uneven surface that caused him to stumble and fall. He landed heavily, the wind forced from his lungs as his chest hit the solid rock floor.

He rolled over and drew in deep, grateful breaths. His eyes were stinging from the smoke, but cleared as he rubbed them. He lifted himself to a sitting position and looked around, trying to make out details in the gloom. The light from the TARDIS illumined only a small area around its landing spot.

He was in a cavern, the dimensions of which were impossible to determine in the enveloping darkness. There was a movement of air, the very lightest of breezes. This was encouraging, as it indicated a route to the outside world. Whatever and wherever this world was. The Doctor looked at the TARDIS. Plumes of smoke still poured from the doors. It would be a while before the repair systems could do their work and he would be able to enter again.

Click-click-clack-clack.

The Doctor turned his head sharply towards the sound. He was looking into total darkness.

"Hello?"

Nothing.

He slowly, carefully, stood up, keeping his eyes fixed on the area of darkness from where the sound had come. As he rose he held onto the nearby rock wall for support, and was surprised to find a substance coating the rock. It stuck to his fingers, something that felt like thin fabric.

He looked at his fingers. The substance was white, stringy, and gelatinous. He spread his fingers and the stuff stretched between them.

It was like cobwebs.

Cobwebs. As in spiders.

Click-click clack-clack click-click clack-clack CLICK-CLICK CLACK-CLACK.

The creatures scuttled out of the dark towards him, around a dozen of them. They were large, about two feet in length, with bulbous carapace-covered bodies. Their heads were a mass of eyes above a wide proboscis, where pincers opened and shut in what looked like an expression of appetite, *click-click clack-clack*. They moved quickly on ten multi-jointed legs.

The Doctor backed up against the TARDIS as the creatures surrounded him. They formed an arc, and stopped as if to consider him. All the time their pincers opened and shut, *click-click clack-clack*.

"Can we be friends?" the Doctor asked with a forced smile.

One of the creatures moved forward and reared up, its front four legs now taking

on the appearance of arms that waved as though sampling the air.

The Doctor asked, “Do you have intelligence? Can you understand me?”

In reply, the creature spat a jet of fluid from its proboscis. The liquid narrowly missed the Doctor’s leg and hit the ground, where it sizzled and smoked.

Acid.

The creature scuttled forward and snapped at the Doctor’s leg. He only just managed to draw back in time to prevent the pincers closing on him.

The other creatures now moved forward and also reared up. The Doctor braced himself to lash out at them before they could launch their acid attack. It was unlikely he would be able to hold them all off.

Then, as suddenly as they had come forward, they stopped and settled on the ground again. The creature that had spat acid at him started writhing as if in pain, its pincers snapping manically and its legs drawing in. After a moment it became still and silent.

The rest of the creatures backed away towards the walls as the Doctor stooped to examine their unmoving brother.

He prodded cautiously at the body with his finger, but this provoked no reaction.

A voice from the dark said, “It is quite dead. It is no longer a threat to you. Nor are any of these other cave-crawlers.”

It was a woman’s voice. She stepped forward now into the area lit by the TARDIS. She was humanoid - slim, with long auburn hair. Her clothing was gaudy; a gold, red and green top and trousers finished off with a high-collared cape. Not the most practical of outfits for exploring caves.

The most striking thing about her was her eyes. Her irises were bright gold. They virtually shone in the dark.

The Doctor asked, “Do I have you to thank for that?”

“For what?”

“For stopping these ‘cave-crawlers’ from attacking me. They had a very sudden change of heart.”

“They are simple creatures. Susceptible to telepathic suggestion.”

“You’re a telepath?”

“Yes, Doctor.”

He scowled at this. “If you’re going to rummage around in my head without asking, be careful what you find there. I don’t use that name. Not any more.”

There was a scramble of activity behind the woman, and she was joined by two

males. They were dressed similarly to her, and they had the same golden eyes. They looked less friendly than the woman, with metal batons raised in their hands.

As a precaution, the Doctor pulled the TARDIS doors closed.

"Is he an escapee?" asked one man.

The woman lifted a calming hand. "He's not one of the menials. He's not even Muranian."

"What?" The second man stepped forward and peered curiously at the Doctor. "He's an off-worlder? An alien?"

"How did you get here? Who are you?" asked the first man.

The woman answered before the Doctor could. "He came in that blue cabinet. It is a space craft. In fact ..." She frowned, puzzled or intrigued. "Possibly more than a space craft... "

"Stop picking around inside my head."

The woman gave a start, looking puzzled. She said, "He has just shut off his thoughts from me."

"How can he do that?" The first man asked.

"He has put up a mental barricade," said the woman. "How interesting. None of the menials can do that."

"Why don't we get to know one another in a more conventional manner?" the Doctor suggested gruffly. "Questions and answers, share a cup of tea, that sort of thing."

The woman considered, then nodded. She said, "I am Larana. This is Kalin. And Orlix."

The first man, Kalin, said, "How did your space craft come to be here, in the tunnels?"

Orlix added, "And why have you come to Muranius?"

'Well," the Doctor began, "to answer your second question first, I didn't choose to come here. I had an emergency and was forced to land. And as for how my ship got to be here, underground? Well, I refer you to my previous answer. I didn't choose that either."

Kalin looked the Doctor up and down and said, "You have come here illegally and will be detained."

The Doctor responded, "I told you, I didn't choose to come here. And shortly, once my ship is repaired, I will leave."

Larana said, "We have a policy of seclusion, Doctor. No outsiders are allowed on Muranius. This protects us. Not least from the Time War."

"Nowhere is protected from the Time War."

Larana's smile fell away. She nodded at Orlix and Kalin. "Seize him."

The two men responded immediately, stepping forward and grabbing the Doctor by his arms. He said, "This isn't necessary." When Orlix produced a pair of electronic handcuffs he said, "And those are definitely not." He pulled his wrists away as Orlix moved to put the handcuffs on him.

"You will comply, Doctor," Larana instructed. To reinforce her instruction she waved a hand towards the cavern walls. In response, the cave-crawlers ventured forward, *click-click-clack-clack*, towards the Doctor.

He considered the advancing arachnoid creatures and their snapping pincers. Then he offered his hands to Orlix, who placed the handcuffs on his wrists. Orlix pressed a button and they locked with an electronic tone.

"You do not decide what is necessary," Larana warned. "Remember I have seen inside your head. You are steeped in the Time War. And you have blood on your hands."

The Doctor said, "It's a war. People die. But when I fight, I fight to save lives."

Larana stepped close to the Doctor and said, quietly but firmly, "Only a few minutes ago, you killed seven Sterrati."

The Doctor didn't speak for a moment. Orlix and Kalin looked at him with renewed concern and tightened their grip on him. Then he said, "That was a very last resort, and I gave them an alternative."

Larana said, "Your memory of it is tinged with doubt. Was it truly a last resort? Or has fighting your Time War made you cruel?"

"Never cruel," the Doctor responded immediately.

Larana considered him for a moment. Then she said, "We'll take him to the surface. He will look on the Gift."

Orlix and Kalin exchanged offended looks. Orlix said, "The Gift is only for Muranians."

"Who says others may not look upon the Gift? Where is that written?" Larana shook her head. "It is not written. We will take him."

"He's standing right here," growled the Doctor, "and he doesn't like being spoken about as if he isn't."

Larana waved her hand again and the cave-crawlers receded back towards the walls. She turned and gestured for Orlix and Kalin to follow. They gripped the Doctor still tighter and followed Larana out of the cavern.

They walked for some time along a narrow tunnel. After a while the Doctor could hear sounds from up ahead – banging, clanging, interspersed with occasional cries.

The tunnel opened up into a natural gallery that followed a path high above an enormous cavern. Unlike the space into which the TARDIS had arrived, this was well lit and busy with life.

It was a mine of some sort, where hundreds of workers toiled away with hammers,

shovels and picks. A system of trolleys and conveyor belts carried dark rocks from the digging sites out of the cavern.

The workers were bedraggled, their clothes torn and filthy. Most of them looked thinner than was healthy, with sickly pale skin. Appallingly, in one corner of the works there was a pile of bodies, with another poor wretch added to it as the Doctor watched. It seemed these people were worked literally until they dropped.

The slave workers were overseen by men and women dressed similarly to Larana and her people. Each carried a baton of the type brandished by Orlix and Kalin.

The Doctor couldn't keep the contempt out of his voice as he said, "This is outrageous. These people are being worked to death."

Larana was unconcerned. "They are menials. You may join them. We will see."

"Are you responsible for this?" the Doctor asked.

"I am the Chief Overseer of this mine," said Larana. "There are many such mines."

"All run like *this*?" the Doctor asked. Larana ignored the question. The Doctor loitered to take a further look at the mine and its terrible conditions, but he was shoved from behind by Kalin and staggered on along the gallery, into another tunnel that led towards daylight.

As they walked up the tunnel, a work party came past them, heading towards the mine. The Doctor looked at the bedraggled, unfortunate specimens as they passed. He looked them in the eye.

As the work party moved on, the Doctor said to Larana, "Your menials. They're Muranian I take it. But they don't have your unusual eye colouring."

Larana said, "No, they do not. They have not been blessed."

"Blessed?"

"The menials were tested, and found wanting," said Orlix.

"Tested? In what way tested?"

Once again the Doctor's question went unanswered. They were approaching a guard detail at the end of the tunnel. There were three golden-eyed guards on duty near the entrance, carrying energy weapons in addition to their batons. Seeing Larana approach, they saluted

One said to Larana, "All correct, Chief Overseer." He looked curiously at the Doctor.

Larana explained, "We found this interloper in the mine."

The guard looked alarmed. "He gained entry to the mine? Past my guards?"

Larana reassured him, "It is no reflection on you or your men, Nelios. We are taking him to the Custodian. That is where I will be if I'm needed."

"Yes, ma'am."

Larana and her group moved on.

The Doctor stepped out of the gloom of the mine into bright daylight. His eyes took a moment to adjust, then he found that he was standing in the middle of an ugly, scarred landscape.

There were hills all around, most dotted with openings like the one he had just emerged through. Presumably those openings led to further mine workings. In other places great pits had been gouged out of the ground, inside which further hordes of unfortunate 'menials' toiled under conditions as severe as those the Doctor had seen underground. Heavy vehicles moved to and fro, pulling trailers piled high with dark rocks dug up by the workforce. Some carried bodies away.

There were scores of large mechanical diggers, working either to enlarge the pits that had already been formed, or unearthing new sites. It all had the look of activity that had begun only relatively recently.

As far as the eye could see, menials toiled under the stern and brutal watch of their golden-eyed overseers. Occasionally a baton-wielding hand would rise in the air, to come sweeping down on a hapless worker.

The Doctor was placed into the back of a small open-topped transporter vehicle, Orlix on one side of him, Larana on the other. Kalin took the driver's seat and they drove off.

The Doctor saw more brutality and death as they went.

Eventually he said, "It can't always have been like this, those with golden eyes victimizing those without. It just can't. No society could survive this for long. You're practicing genocide on these people. What happened here?"

Larana said, "What you see is a consequence of nature. The survival of the fittest, and the best adapted. Enough questions, though. Very soon you will have your answers. You may even be blessed, and join us."

The Doctor said, "I will have no part in this."

They continued on. Shortly they passed another pile of dead menials. Four of the golden-eyed were standing nonchalantly next to them. One of the four said something that led to an outburst of raucous laughter.

The Doctor said, "And you accuse me of cruelty..."

He dropped his head to avoid looking at the laughing group. As he did, he noticed a small rock lying on the floor by his feet. He picked it up and turned it over. It was jet black, with mirror-smooth facets. He held it up and with daylight behind it he could see it was suffused with lines of bright blue.

He asked Larana, “Is this what your so-called menials are digging up for you?”

Larana took no interest in the question. She pointed ahead. “Nearly there.”

The Doctor saw the outline of a city appearing over the horizon. A cluster of tall, angular structures rose above a sprawl of more functional buildings, within a crenellated wall.

There were no menials in the city. Or at least none that could be seen as the Doctor’s party drove through the streets. All he saw were the golden-eyed. They were all of them smiling.

Their vehicle stopped outside an official-looking glass edifice, and the Doctor was escorted inside past a guard who recognized Larana and her authority.

The inside of the building was a haven of serenity after the horror and cacophony of the landscape beyond the city. The Doctor was taken into a great hall, a still, quiet space bathed in lights of various hues from the multi-coloured glass panels in the walls and the domed ceiling.

At the far end of this hall, a robed and hooded figure was sitting in apparent contemplation on an oversized throne-like wooden chair. The figure rose as Larana entered with the Doctor, Orlix and Kalin.

A firm voice came from beneath the hood. “You bring an off-worlder here, Larana?”

For the first time, Larana appeared less than sure of herself. “I ... I hope I have not caused offence, Custodian. You can read my thoughts, you know this man is unusual. Even for an off-worlder.”

The hooded figure seemed to consider this, then said, “You have caused no offence.” The hood encompassed his face entirely, and was so low that the Doctor could see nothing of him. Nothing but a golden glow that played around the edge of the material.

Then the Custodian pulled back the hood, revealing himself. A man with an old face, a tidy grey beard framing a broad, kindly smile. And eyes that blazed gold. Not just the irises as was the case with Larana and the others – the sockets were entirely filled with a fiery golden glow.

The Custodian looked directly at the Doctor, and frowned as he studied him. “My, he’s a strange one. Are you blocking me? I can’t reach into your thoughts.”

The Doctor said, “As I pointed out to Larana, it’s impolite to – “

The Custodian tilted his head to one side and narrowed his eyes, and the Doctor flinched with pain. His hands shot to his head.

But he soon regained his composure, lowered his hands and stood straight. “You’ll have to do better than that to get inside my head.”

Larana addressed the Custodian. “I respectfully request that he should look upon the Gift.”

The Custodian hadn’t taken his eyes off the Doctor. “I am not sure. This is not usual.”

Larana said, “He can block his mind to me and even to you, Custodian. But the Gift will tell us what sort of a man he truly is. Even what his intentions are, and whether he is a threat to Muranius.”

“That is true,” said the Custodian.

Larana went on, “And if he is a good man, if he has worth, he may be chosen.”

The Doctor cut in, “I’d rather not be chosen if it’s all the same to you. Whatever it involves.”

“Silence.” The Custodian spoke softly but with authority. Then he turned from the Doctor to Larana and nodded. “Very well. Bring him.”

The Custodian turned and walked towards a nearby ornate door. Orlix and Kalin pushed the Doctor after him.

The Custodian opened the door and led them into a smaller chamber lit by soft yellow lamps. The room had no windows. The walls were lined with rows of small alcoves, inside each of which sat a grey, mottled rock on a small red cushion.

The Custodian said, “Remove his restraints.”

Orlix removed the Doctor’s handcuffs. He and Kalin took up position by the door, the only way out of the chamber.

As the Doctor flexed his newly-liberated wrists, the Custodian asked, “You do not know anything of our recent history?”

The Doctor shook his head. “Nothing except that you seem determined to kill a large percentage of your population, apparently because they don’t share your eye colour.”

The Custodian said, “We, the people of Muranius, have been blessed with a Gift. This Gift was visited upon us from the skies, less than two years ago.”

The Doctor looked again at the rows of rocks. “Meteorites?”

“It was a marvellous sight. The heavens were lit with hundreds of thousands of streaks of light as the Gift descended on that first night.”

Larana added, “It was marvellous. Although at first, some were fearful.”

“At first,’ the Custodian agreed. “But not for long. The Gift, these ‘meteorites’ as we too thought they were, were found all across our lands.”

Larana nodded, now with the broadest of smiles on her face. “And the Custodian was the first to be blessed. I was there.”

The Custodian nodded. “I was not the Custodian then, of course. I was an Elder, one

of the ruling Parliament. I asked for one of these falling stars to be brought to me."

Larana explained, "At this point, many of the rocks had been recovered but the Gift had not yet been experienced."

The Custodian turned his palms up and cupped them. "I held the rock in my hands, I looked it all over. And then I felt it... come alive." He looked at his hands intently, clearly lost in the memory. "It is a beautiful thing to remember. It became warm in my hands. I felt an essence flow into my arms and into my body, a slight vibration in the rock. Then the rock split, and I was bathed in the Gift." He smiled serenely, recalling the experience.

"Go on," said the Doctor.

The Custodian gave no sign of having heard the Doctor's interjection but continued in any case. "The rock split like a gourd, and inside was a light, a light that looked into me. It saw me, my qualities and worth. And it chose me."

"How were you 'chosen'?" asked the Doctor.

"There was a rush, like a wave of... of life. Renewed life. Renewed energy. *Purpose*. I was opened to the light and the world was opened to me."

The Doctor harrumphed. "You might have to explain the 'world was opened to you' bit."

The Custodian said, "You will not treat this with levity, Doctor."

"I'm not," said the Doctor firmly.

The Custodian went on, "My mind was opened. I could hear the thoughts of others. I could even influence them."

"It gave you your telepathic ability?"

Larana said, "The blessing was not apparent at first. The Custodian was afraid, we thought he was injured. And of course, there were his eyes."

The Custodian said, "The golden eyes are the sign that the Gift has chosen you."

The Doctor said, "The process transforms your eyes? It changes the pigmentation?"

"Yes, but it is only an outward sign," said Larana. "The true blessing of the Gift is the raised awareness of self and others, of purpose as the Custodian says. The ability to share thoughts and, for some of us, to make the cave-crawlers and other creatures respond to our unspoken commands."

The Custodian said, "I, being the first, perhaps, was more affected than others. I wear this," he gestured to his fully golden eye sockets, "humbly but proudly as a sign that I was the first of my people to be chosen."

The Doctor said, "I assume it didn't take long before many more were 'chosen'?"

Larana said, "After the Gift had been looked upon by the Custodian, it was seen by all others. The rocks would open to anyone who held them. There were many of us in the

Parliament at the time the Custodian was chosen. We all took them in our hands. We all looked into the light, and all of us in that room were chosen."

The Doctor asked grimly, "How long before someone looked into the light and was not chosen?"

The Custodian said, "The light sees into the person. Some are unworthy. The people of our cities flocked to look on the Gift. But if the Gift saw they were cruel, or weak, or interested only in the self, they would not be chosen."

"Discarded for being cruel? It seems to me from what I've seen it's the other way around."

Orlix cut in to say, "The menials, any who remain dark eyed, are no better than the cave-crawlers."

The Doctor looked at them each in turn, then said, "'The plain-bellied Sneetches had none upon thars'."

"What?" asked the Custodian, bemused.

"Wise words I once heard from another Doctor. Name of Seuss." He went on, "So if I get this right, the leadership and some of the general population were 'chosen'? And those who weren't 'chosen', who weren't 'blessed' with this gift of golden eyes and telepathic ability, they became second class – no, let me correct that – tenth class citizens. With no rights. And they were put to work in your mines and quarries, digging up this black mineral?"

The Custodian did not reply for a moment. Then he said, "We shall see how you feel once you have also looked upon the Gift."

"No." The Doctor was adamant.

The Custodian smirked. "You have no choice. Hold him still."

Orlix and Kalin stepped forward and forced the Doctor against the wall as the Custodian walked to an alcove and lifted out one of the rocks.

The Doctor called out as he struggled, "You're being used! Think about it! The first of these things activated only after it was taken to someone in authority. The first wave affected those around that person, also part of the leadership. That's *planned!*"

The Custodian held the rock in his hand and approached the Doctor, raising it towards his face.

The Doctor cried, "Have none of you got enough self-determination left to realize what has happened to you? You're being manipulated!"

The Custodian raised the rock towards the Doctor's face.

"And what is this black mineral you're digging up? Do you know? Because I do, and I don't think you have any idea. It's Jenelium! That's a powerful source of –"

The Custodian touched the rock to the Doctor's cheek. The stone began to resonate with a low vibration.

"Feel the power of the Gift, Doctor," the Custodian cooed.

The Doctor pulled his face away, but it was too late. The rock had reacted to his touch. Fracture lines were forming on its surface.

Then it split, falling into five pieces in the Custodian's hand.

Inside was a fierce yellow – no, golden – light. Intense, concentrated in a compact, energized sphere.

Golden rays shot out suddenly from this concentrated mass towards the Doctor. They streamed into his eyes and bathed his face.

The Doctor stared as the light burned. As bright as the light was, he seemed unable to shut his eyes or even blink.

And then, suddenly, the light was gone.

The Doctor screwed his eyes tight shut and went limp. At a nod from the Custodian, Orlix and Kalin let him fall and he went to his knees, head bowed. He cupped his hands to his face.

The Custodian and his fellow Muranians watched and waited as the Doctor composed himself.

The Doctor spoke weakly through his hands. "I felt it straight away, when you put the rock against my cheek ... that subtle energy, like a living thing, just the way you described it. Running through me, through my whole body... "

"The Gift was searching you, Doctor," the Custodian said, more kindly than before.

"I could feel it in my head too. A presence, digging, breaking through any barrier I could put up. Looking into my memories, my experiences... It found me. Who I am. It found the Doctor."

The Doctor lifted his head and stared straight at the Custodian. With his resolutely brown eyes.

"... and it was afraid!"

The Custodian surprised Larana and the others with his reaction to the Doctor's exclamation. He staggered backwards, his hands going to his head, moaning in pain.

Larana said, "What's happening? Custodian?"

Orlix said, "He has been rejected. He should join the menials!" He stooped to take hold of the Doctor.

"NO."

The single syllable word was spoken with unnatural energy and resonance. It had

come from the Custodian, but it was not his voice. As everyone in the room watched, the old man straightened until he stood taller than before. His golden eyes burned with a new ferocity. The expression on his face showed concern. He extended an arm and pointed a bony finger at the Doctor.

"YOU ... ARE A TIME LORD."

The Doctor smiled. "That scared you, didn't it?" He rose to his feet.

Orlix, Kalin and Larana exchanged looks with each other. They were spectators for the time being.

The Doctor brushed dust from his knees and moved towards the Custodian. He said, "You're brave enough when it comes to taking on Muranians. Not so much when you look into a Time Lord. When you know what we are capable of. What I am capable of."

The Custodian took a step back from the Doctor. "WE WISH NO CONFLICT WITH THE TIME LORDS."

Larana looked scared and puzzled. "Custodian? What is happening?"

"He's not the Custodian," said the Doctor. "I don't think there's been much of the Custodian in there for some time. That body is a vessel."

The Custodian adopted a stance with his arms forming an X across his chest, hands at his shoulders.

The Doctor said, "Will you speak the name of your race?"

The Custodian remained silent.

The Doctor nodded. "No need. I think I know who you are. You are the Celephas."

The Custodian's mouth opened and remained opened as the Celephas spoke through him. "WHAT HAPPENS HERE IS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR TIME WAR."

The Doctor erupted with fury. "What happens here is everything to do with me and any right-thinking sentient being in the universe!!!" He stopped and looked down. His right hand was clenched in a fist. Just like after the Sterrati incident, his fingers digging so tightly into his palm they almost drew blood. And just like before, the fist trembled, a manifestation of fury, a hammer of flesh and bone.

"YOU ARE ANGER. YOU ARE WRATH. YOU ARE DEATH."

The Doctor snapped his head up, to look with contempt at the Custodian.

He strode forward and stopped within a foot of the Custodian. He raised his fist in front of his face. He stared into those glowing, intense golden eyes, his own face set in an expression of effort.

And then his fingers sprung open, and the hammer fist became a hand again.

The Doctor suppressed a look of triumph and said, "I control who and what I am."

Then he said, “I have chosen to be a warrior. For the first time in my existence, I have taken this path ... I have done what has to be done, and will continue to do so. Not in the cause of victory. But in the cause of bringing peace, an end to the Time War ...”

The Doctor brought his face to within an inch of the Custodian’s.

“... and any other vile injustice I meet along the way.”

The Custodian said, “YOU CANNOT STOP THIS. IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE.”

Larana said, “What is happening here?”

The Doctor turned to Larana and said, “You have been invaded.”

Orlix came back immediately. “That’s nonsense! Invaded? There are only Muranians here! There are no others!”

‘There’s him,” said the Doctor, nodding to the Custodian. “And then there’s you, Orlix.”

Orlix bridled. “What do you say?”

The Doctor continued, “And you, Kalin.” He took a few steps towards Lorana and looked into her golden eyes. “And you, Larana. And every one of the chosen.”

Kalin said, “This is ridiculous.”

Larana trembled. She looked as if she might cry.

Seeing her reaction, the Doctor said, “I think you understand now, don’t you, Larana?”

Larana’s voice shook as she said, making a question of it, “The Celephas are in us? They are in us all?”

The Doctor nodded. “Those meteorites, sent by the Celephas, each contain a hyponeural element. Once that element is implanted through the optic nerve it links each of the chosen to an individual Celephas. They’re out there in space, perhaps a light year away, but also in your subconscious. Directing your every move.”

“No,” said Orlix with an emphatic sweep of his arm. “I am chosen. And I am Orlix. I am not Celephas.”

The Doctor came back just as emphatically. “I asked you before, what is the mineral you’re digging up in your mines and quarries. Well, what is it?”

Orlix hesitated. He looked at Kalin, who seemed to be straining to remember.

“Come on, come on,” goaded the Doctor. “I told you. I told you the name. What are you mining? It seems to be your principal purpose at the moment. You’re killing your own people in the process. So WHAT is it??” He was raging now.

The silence that followed was broken by Larana, who said quietly, “You called it Jenelium.”

The Doctor nodded. “Yes. But you don’t know what Jenelium is, do you?”

“What is it?” Kalin asked.

“It’s a super-efficient power source. Jenelium ore was the breakthrough discovery in the development of faster-than-light space travel.”

“Jenelium...” Orlix rubbed at his forehead as if trying to coax a memory.

“Of course it’s of limited use to your people,” said the Doctor.

Kalin said, “What?”

Larana understood. “We do not travel to the stars. We do not use faster-than-light engines”

The Doctor went on, “You’re mining it for the Celephas. You’re acting under their direction. The menials as you call them, you’re working them to their deaths for the Celephas. Who, when they are ready, will come in and take the Jenelium, and dispose of you.”

Orlix turned to the Custodian. “Is this true?”

The Doctor said, “You don’t even realize the cruelty of how you are behaving to your own people. The Celephas Gift corrupts your perception. You have an utter belief that you are special, set apart from others. The Celephas take away your empathy and compassion.”

Orlix approached the Custodian. He snarled, “I said – is this true?”

The Custodian said, “ENOUGH.”

Orlix collapsed to the floor, unmoving. Lifeless.

Kalin moved towards Orlix’s body. But as he did, the Custodian looked at him and Kalin too fell in a heap on the floor.

The Doctor ran urgently to Larana, digging out his sonic screwdriver. He thumbed a control, the sonic powered up, and he applied it to her forehead.

Larana asked, “What are you doing?”

“Saving your life,” said the Doctor.

The Custodian looked towards them. “YOU CANNOT SAVE HER.”

The Doctor ignored him and told Larana, “He killed Orlix and Kalin using their link with the Cephelas. I’ve put a block around your mind. It’s temporary, but you’re no longer linked to them. You have free will again.”

Larana asked, “Are you sure?”

The Doctor dug in his pocket and produced a small mirror. He raised it for Larana to look at herself.

Her eyes were no longer golden. They were a deep blue. And as Larana looked at

them in the mirror, tears formed.

Then she said, “You said this was temporary. How temporary?”

The Doctor didn’t reply. His lips formed a tight line.

“Doctor. How long?”

He shook his head. “Not long.”

A short laugh came from the vessel that was the Custodian. “I TOLD YOU, YOU CANNOT SAVE HER. AND NOW, WE ARE COMING.”

Larana turned on the Custodian and yelled, “You monsters! What have you done to us?!!”

The Custodian did not reply but continued to look at her with his blazing golden eyes. Then he turned to look at the Doctor. “YOU CANNOT SAVE HER. IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE TO SAVE ANY OF THEM. OUR FLEET IS COMING. WE WILL TAKE WHAT IS OURS.”

And then the Custodian crumpled to the floor.

Larana asked, “What happened to him?”

The Doctor said, “The Celephas didn’t need that body any more.” He looked towards the door. “Oh no.”

“What?” asked Larana.

The Doctor said, “The Celephas would have been using the Custodian as a central point to control your people. If they’ve decided they don’t need him...” He didn’t finish the thought, but took Larana’s hand and headed for the door. “Come on!”

They ran out.

It had become a city of the dead.

Emerging from the building, the Doctor and Larana found the square outside and the surrounding streets littered with Muranian bodies

Larana was distraught. “What happened?”

The Doctor spoke through his anger. “The Celephas controlled your people as long as they had a use for them. Now they’ve decided to cut their losses, they’ve terminated them.”

“Terminated? You mean murdered.”

“I mean murdered. Yes.”

Larana asked, “When your block around my mind fails, is this what will happen to me?”

The Doctor looked her determinedly in the eye and said, “Not if I can help it. Get in the transporter.” The vehicle that had brought them here was still where Kalin had left it, in the street outside the building.

Larana climbed in, and the Doctor took the driver’s seat. He pressed the initiator, the engine powered up, and he floored the accelerator.

The transporter’s tyres screamed as power was transferred from the engine, and it shot forward. The Doctor spun the wheel, the vehicle turned sharply and sped into a side street.

The Doctor drove at speed, occasionally having to avoid fallen Muranians in the street, reversing the route from earlier, heading back to the city gates.

The Doctor had to shout above the engine noise to speak to Larana. “The Celephas will be on their way to recover the Jenelium that your people have mined! If they have light-drive engines, which they will, they could be here in no time!”

Larana said, “We should make ready! We must defend the planet!”

The Doctor said, “Larana, your planet is past the point where it can defend itself! Look around you! This will be the same all over your world!”

Larana knew he meant the Muranian dead that littered every street of the city. She fell silent, trying to take in the enormity of what the Doctor had just said.

And the transporter sped on.

Once they were outside the city they raced towards the hills, back towards the mine workings where the Doctor had arrived. En route they passed more dead Muranians, the former golden-eyed overseers. The ‘menials’ were milling around, looking confused.

Larana said, “Could we not organize the menials into a defensive force?”

The Doctor shook his head. “Look at them. Docile to the point of being mindless. The Gift didn’t just select some of your people to be among the golden ‘chosen’, but those it rejected as menials were also affected. They would have been processed to make them subservient, to fit into their roles as a slave workforce. They no longer have individual identity. And when the Celephas arrive these people will obey their instructions without question.”

Larana felt heartbroken as she looked at the blank, confused faces of the menials standing at the roadside, watching them pass.

She said, “How is it possible that they could do this to us? How could we become so cruel? How could *I* be so cruel?”

The Doctor said, “You had no choice.”

There was a thunderous sound from above.

Larana and the Doctor looked up and saw a huge dart-shaped object appear from out of the clouds. It was a space craft, about two miles long. Its sleek underbelly was dotted with gun ports.

"The Celephas!" said the Doctor. "They got here even quicker than I thought!"

He had barely finished speaking when a line of gunports flared, and energy beams shot towards them.

The ground exploded on either side of the transporter.

The Doctor gunned the engine and twisted the steering wheel to and fro, making them a more difficult target.

Further energy beams shot from the Celephas ship, and again tore up the ground on either side of the vehicle. The Doctor and Larana were showered with dirt. A further shot exploded ahead of them, making a crater in the ground that the Doctor only just managed to steer around.

Then Larana shouted "There!" and pointed ahead to a hill with a mine opening at its base. This was the mine where the Doctor had arrived.

"Hang on!" cried the Doctor. He coaxed further power from the engine and they raced for the mine opening.

Larana looked towards the Celephas ship, and said, "What are they?"

The Doctor looked up. About fifty objects, dark metal ovals, were being dropped from the ship and plummeting towards the ground to their right. Halfway to the surface retro jets fired on each of the objects, slowing their descent. And then, just before the ground, they split in half and figures leapt out, landing sure footedly on the dirt surface.

"Celephas warriors!" said the Doctor.

The Celephas were lizard-like and tall. Thin, lithe, with oversized golden orbs for eyes. They also carried long-barrelled energy weapons, which they brought up and aimed towards the Doctor's vehicle even as they started running towards him. They had long, flexible limbs and moved at incredible speed across the terrain, closing on the Doctor and Larana.

The energy rounds from the Celephas warriors were striking all around the transporter as the Doctor drove straight at the opening in the hillside. One round hit the rear tailgate.

"Brace yourself!" the Doctor called. "We don't have time to stop!"

He drove straight at the mine opening, and into it. Larana cried out as they were plunged into the dark of the hillside's interior. The transporter slewed and bumped on the uneven surface, and slammed off one of the tunnel walls before the Doctor brought it to a skidding halt.

As soon as they stopped, about a hundred metres inside the tunnel, the Doctor

grabbed Larana's arm and pulled her out of the vehicle. "Run! The Celephas will catch up to us shortly!"

They both ran into the tunnel, racing for their lives. They had no time to consider the bodies of the Muranian guards, including Nelios, lying where they had fallen.

When they reached the gallery above the main mineworks cavern, they saw hordes of menials milling around, looking listlessly at the bodies of their former slave masters.

They were almost clear of this gallery when energy rounds were shot at them from behind and ricocheted off the wall next to them. The Celephas were closing on them.

The Doctor and Larana ran on with renewed urgency, with occasional further energy blasts exploding near to them.

Soon they ran into the cavern where the TARDIS was sitting. The Doctor said, "We made it!" and dug the TARDIS key from his pocket. He placed it in the lock and opened the door. "Get inside!"

He became aware that Larana wasn't immediately behind him. He looked back and saw her on her knees near the cave entrance, her head in her hands. "Larana!"

She said weakly, "My head... Doctor, I think it's happening. I feel myself slipping away."

"Oh no you don't." The Doctor raced to her, grabbed her arm and dragged her across the floor. "Just a few seconds longer, Larana! Come on, once you're inside the TARDIS you'll be safe!" She was weak, almost a dead weight, and the Doctor had to use all his strength to pull her to the open TARDIS doors.

Just as he reached the ship, the first of the Celephas warriors entered the cavern.

"Ssssstop!" one of them called with angry sibilance. The warrior brought his gun up to the aim. Another Celephas ran in behind him and also raised his gun.

Then there was a hiss, a spitting sound, and the first warrior screamed and fell, gripping his leg.

Four of the arachnoid cave-crawlers had emerged from the dark next to the Celephas, agitated and angry. One had shot an acid spurt at the first warrior, and now the other three also reared up and shot acid jets towards the figures in the cave entrance.

The Celephas screamed as they were struck, and turned their weapons on the cave-crawlers.

While the Celephas and the cave-crawlers fought their battle, the Doctor shoved Larana through the TARDIS doors then followed her in. He slammed the doors shut.

The Doctor rested against the doors for a moment, getting his breath back. He spared a moment to look at his right hand. No clenched fist this time. He smiled.

Then he saw Larana, climbing hesitantly to her feet. "My head has cleared," she said. "I feel fine."

"The Celephas can't touch you in here," the Doctor explained. "Technically, we're outside of all time and space."

Larana took a few seconds to look around the impossibly-sized room that she now found herself in. She looked impressed, but she had concerns. "Does that mean I have to stay in here forever?"

The Doctor looked around, happy to see that the smoke had entirely cleared and the repair functions had done their job. He said, "No. I'm glad to say, there is another solution."

An hour later, relatively speaking, the Doctor and Larana were a thousand years back in time and three million light years away, standing outside the TARDIS on the surface of a planet called Flarin Major. It was, the Doctor told Larana, a peaceful place, home to a hospitable people who would make her very welcome.

He went on, "You'll be safe here, in this place and in this time. The Celephas won't break out of their star system and try to extend their empire for another five centuries. They won't be around to exert their influence on you."

Larana said, "I will never see my world or my people again."

The Doctor said, "Your world as you knew it disappeared the moment those meteorites exerted their influence."

Larana shook her head. "I can't believe there are races as cruel as that in the universe. If they had attacked us, if they had landed and taken us over, even that would have been better than what they did. To manipulate us like puppets, to make us turn on our own people ... it's horrible."

The Doctor said, "There are evil races in this universe. Fortunately they are in the minority. But their influence and their aspirations have a terrible effect on those races that make up the vast majority."

Larana said, "Is this your life? Is this what you do? Facing evil like this? Saving people? Saving planets?"

The Doctor shrugged and moved towards the open TARDIS doors. "I was too late for Muranius." He paused on the threshold. "I'm glad I was at least able to save you."

Larana ran her hand down the outside of the TARDIS. "This is a remarkable ship. What is next for you?"

The Doctor said, "I'm going back. I'm going to visit the Celephas, I'm going to destroy their fleet and I'm going to make sure they can't do to another world what they did to Muranius."

Larana was speechless.

The Doctor smiled. "Goodbye, Larana." He ducked inside the TARDIS, then briefly

reappeared.

"By the way, can I just the say, you have the most beautiful blue eyes? Much better."

Larana smiled with embarrassment. "Thank you."

He grinned broadly, then disappeared behind the closing door.

And then he and the TARDIS were gone.

The Girl with the Purple Hair (I)

Jenny Shirt could walk through walls. She could move through Time like a gust of wind. She could meet herself coming back and stop herself going forward.

Theoretically, of course. She hadn't yet asked. But when she was in the TARDIS she felt empowered, she felt special. Being with Foreman in his wonderful blue box made her - Jenny Shirt, an Earthling from dull old Polyalbion Garden City - feel like the most important person in the universe. With all of time and space just beyond the door…

He didn't want a companion on his travels. Foreman would say that every time. He'd stand in the TARDIS doorway and tell her that "It's just for one trip." Or "There's something I'd like you to see."

The first time she'd met him he had been a young man. Elfin faced, a tangle of black hair and dark chary eyes that were constantly flitting and skipping. A long dark jacket cut a Bryonesque swathe, but seemed to belong to somebody else. So did the bandolier he wore across his chest, a brown battered utility belt with an odd metal probe the only weapon in his holster. He was a man uncomfortable in his own skin, out of time and at odds with the universe. But he came to save the world and Jenny helped him do it.

The next time she saw him, one week later, he had been old and bearded. Grey haired, face lined like the leather coat he wore. Eyes light and watery; eyes that had witnessed a surfeit of pain and perdition, seen an excess of hell.

He told her how and why and where and when, which part of his life he'd come from and what he'd come back for. But he never told her *who*. He said his name was Foreman, but Jenny shirt didn't believe him. Jenny Shirt was smart. Jenny Shirt knew it all.

"There she is" he would say each time. "The girl with the purple hair!"

Some days an old man, some days middle aged, some days hunched like a beggar and limping. It was the days he came as a young man that Jenny Shirt learned to dread…

An Historical Curiosity

by Matthew Sweet

~~HENRY V~~

THE WAR DOCTOR

This fragment appears to be a variant version of *Henry V*, Shakespeare's play about the events before and after the battle of Agincourt in 1415[1]. It would seem – from the unfinished nature of this draft - that Shakespeare was persuaded[2] to 'scale down' his ambitious piece and choose a subject more relatable to an audience at that time. It was discovered by the archivist [redacted] in the Black Archive, with an 1899 Paternoster Wax Stamp dated 1901 declaring it 'On temporary loan from the Torchwood Institute'.

The War Doctor leads Gallifreyan forces against the enemy, and just as Henry's rousing speech at Agincourt[3] is followed by the blunderings of a motley group of footsoldiers and their boy, the Doctor's speech against the Daleks receives a similar answer: an exchange between a bullying commander, Maxil, the venal Castellan Kelner and the cowardly Commentator Runcible (here in his male form). As in other versions of the text, the boy determines to leave their service. This play is thought to relate to two other lost works: *Borusa, His Fall*[4] and *The Tragicall History of Pandak III*[5].

1 - Friday, 25 October 1415 (Saint Crispin's Day),

2 - Possibly in midwinter 1598 during 'The Affaire Of The Moderne Luminousity'

3 - See Henry V by William Shakespeare. Written in 1598, in the First Quarto text, it was entitled The Cronicle History of Henry the fift which became The Life of Henry the Fifth in the First Folio text. The play is the final part of a tetralogy, preceded by Richard II, Henry IV, Part 1 and Henry IV, Part 2.

4 - Ibid

5 - Ibid

PROLOGUE

Enter Chorus

SCENE I. Gallifrey. Before Skarosa Neba[6].

Alarum. Enter WAR DOCTOR, WAR LORD, COMMANDER ANDRED, COMMANDER HILRED, NESBIN, an Outsider, and Soldiers, with scaling-ladders.

WAR DOCTOR

Once more unto the breach, dear friends[7], once more;
Or close the wall up with our Time Lord dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
Than ordered calm within the Capitol;
But when the Daleks mass without our walls
Then ape the action of the renegade.
Summon the blood into your pounding hearts.
Banish the dormouse with hard-favour'd rage;
Mimic the cult of warlike Morbius[8];
Harness the fury felt by Omega
Confin'd within the Singularity,
As we gained temporal power from his deeds.
Conceive his anger as he oped the mask
And saw the world was nothing but his will.
For Lords like us such strength should be enough
To turn the sons of Skaro into dust.
On, on, you noble Gallifreyan lads.
Whose line descends from mighty Rassilon[9]
And from whose blood each one of you retains
An appetite for war among the stars.
Forget the shame of Minyos and the dread
Of what the vault of the Dark Tower preserves.
Remember how the Vardans were repelled
How Sontar fell in the Panopticon.
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest

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6 - One of the artificial Skaro replacement planets, created in the early days of the Time War as a method of avoiding another 'Skaro Devastation after the 'Hand Of Omega Paradox' (or, in terrestrial terms, 'The Shoreditch Incident' UNIT file CounterMeasure#003(CoalHill#12) 11/1963)

7 - Sic.

8 - Morbius, a notorious and malevolent renegade Time Lord, later to become the head of the High Council of Time Lords. His warlike nature led him to urge the Time Lords toward a policy of conquest and he formed a personal army of mercenaries, bought by his promises of time travel and immortality. His following came to be known as the Cult of Morbius. He attempted to overturn Gallifrey's non-interference policy in favour of military conquest, but was exiled and eventually executed, only to survive, saved by his followers, as a living brain maintained by a human scientist who strove to construct a new body for him on the planet Karn. Eventually defeated and finally killed, there were, however, rumblings during the darkest days of the War about the possibility of resurrecting him as a valuable asset to the Time Lord cause. This was deemed too dangerous and, instead, plans were drawn-up to bring back Rassilon instead.

9 - Pre-Resurrection.

That those who turned the Looms[10] did beget you.
Be copy now to the Outsider tribes,
And teach them how to war. And Shobogans[11],
Recall you routed the conspirators
When the disgrace of Ravalox[12] was heard.
And in this sky-trench let us truly swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base,
That could not look the vortex in the eye.
I see you stand like pig-rats in their holes
Eager to taste hot blood. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this day
Cry "Prydon, Rassilon and Gallifrey!"[13]

Exeunt. Alarum, and chambers go off

SCENE II. The same.

Enter COMMANDER MAXIL, CASTELLAN KELNER, COMMENTATOR RUNCIBLE[14] and BOY

MAXIL

On, on, on, on, on! To the breach, to the breach!

RUNCIBLE

Pray thee, Commander, stay: the ruby-rays are too hot; and, for mine own part, I have not a case of lives: I crave something cooler than extermination; and that is the very plain-song of it.

KELNER

The plain-song is most just: and better than

10 - Perhaps Shakespeare's interlocutor had discussed with him 'The Loom Slander'. This was, essentially, a piece of propaganda, circulated by Dalek agents and sympathisers in the early days of the War. Spread by appeasers, turncoats and quislings throughout Gallifreyan society, and further afield, 'The Loom Slander' was a rumour, a lie, an attempt to undermine the Time Lords and encourage other races, other species, to turn against the Time Lords with the implication that Gallifreyans were not born of womb, but were, in fact, 'grown' in a genetic database known as a Loom, therefore claiming no more legitimacy than the Daleks. "Daleks are made and Time Lords are made. Who can tell the difference?" became, for a short time, a refrain throughout the Universe. It was, of course, absolute nonsense, but did serve to weaken the image of the Time Lords in the eyes of the wider universe.

11 - A derogatory term, pre-dating the War, for the Gallifreyan non-Time Lord lower classes.

12 - The name of a possible future version of the Planet Earth. As the events leading to Ravalox's discovery and the conspiracy that brought about its situation pre-date the Time War, there is the strong probability that this particular time-line was re-purposed for the war effort, thus cancelling out the events.

13 - In later stages of the Time War, Rassilon ensured that only his own name was to be used in any battle cry. On pain of death.

14 - Runcibles role as 'commentator' refers to his position as embedded War Correspondent as well as being the official scribe of the Time Lord War Council. This, therefore, is prior to his drafting into active service and regeneration. Runcible became a War TARDIS flotilla Commander and was known as 'Lady Runcible The Fearless' one of he most ruthless and capable soldiers in her field.

The notes you sound on Public Register.
The Daleks go and come; Prydons, Patrexes die;
And sword and shield,
In bloody field,
Doth win immortal fame.

BOY

Would I were in the Capitol! I would give all my fame for a pot of food pills and safety.

KELNER

And I:
If wishes would prevail with me,
My purpose should not fail with me,
But thither would I hie.

BOY

As duly, but not as truly,
As flutterwing doth sing on bough.

Enter NESBIN, an Outsider

NESBIN

Up to the breach, you dogs! Avaunt, you cullions! Soft creatures who ne'er ate flesh or fruit or felt the wind upon your face.

Driving them forward

KELNER

Be merciful, good sir, to indoor men.
Abate thy rage, abate thy manly rage,
Abate thy rage, rever'd Excellency!

RUNCIBLE

Horrible. Horrible.

Exeunt all but Boy

BOY

As young as I am, I have observed these three
Heroes. I am boy to them all three: but all they
three, though they would serve me, could not be Lord
to me; for indeed three such antics do not amount to
a Lord. For Maxil, he is white-livered and
red-faced; he quivers like the plume upon
his crown. And through the Citadel 'tis known

The greatest shot that Maxil ever loosed
Was at an unarmed man on Gallifrey,
Running towards him down a corridor.
For Kelner, he hath a warlike tongue,
As fits the office of the Castellan.
But even I, who never read a book
Still less procured a data extract core
Knows him as he who asked the President
What colour jelly baby he desired
And Stor how high he wanted him to jump.
For Runcible, who is called fatuous,
He counterfeits no martial mien,
But what has he instead? Merely
Volleys of speech and a propensity
For vulgar facetiousness. But perhaps
Tis folly to expect aught but faint heart
From those who speak to camera for their trade.
And none of them, I fear, will quit themselves
With any honour on time's battlefield.
If Daleks do not slay them, our side will;
And they'll deserve their fate. I am resolved
To leave them, and seek some better service:
Their villany goes against my weak stomach, and
Therefore I must cast it up.

Exit

Here Comes the Doctor

by Christopher Bryant

From almost any perspective, The Hospital was incomprehensible. To perceive it in its entirety, it helped to be about eight kilometres from ground level and about twice that distance due west. Nobody could now remember a time when a ship could have viewed it from this vantage point.

The main building of The Hospital had begun as a modest facility of around five hundred square kilometres but had since sprawled outwards to incorporate most of the surrounding city into its function. It currently reached almost eight hundred storeys. Automated building droids continued to construct upwards and outwards, but The Hospital had last boasted a vacant bed some three centuries ago. The structure's bizarre topography wasn't improved by the time-spillage from nearby battles, causing many storeys to be built years before their supporting floors. In every direction around the facility's base stretched medical tents crammed full of patients, spilling out into the unforgiving glare of the planet's ever-present red sun.

Vast but inadequate armies of nurses patrolled the tents. Often they merely attempted to soothe their desperate patients; occasionally they could offer something more practical. In many cases they simply called over an orderly to dispose of the corpse.

It was towards the end of the ninth hour of the one thousand, four hundred and seventy sixth shift of Genice's nursing career. Her legs carried her automatically through the latest of the series of aisles allocated to her. The fixed smile she'd adopted nine hours ago had given way to the usual blank stare of which patients and nursing staff alike were barely even conscious.

Towards the end of this particular godforsaken aisle, a patient reached out far enough towards her to tumble half out of bed. She hurried to rescue him, flinching at the sight of his blistered, disfigured features. Even an optimistic estimate would suggest to Nurse Genice that this bed would have found a new occupant by the next time she passed this way on a shift. Slumping back on his inadequate cot, the anonymous patient croaked urgently to her, but any hope of recognisable speech had clearly fled long ago. In the usual way, she prattled on soothingly, attempting to encourage the patient better, but his desperation only increased. Vexed, she glanced up at a movement and her expression brightened.

"Here comes the doctor!"

The newcomer's expression did not follow suit at the sight of the suffering in the tent. Eyes that had seen too much, glared out of a lined, time-ravaged face. With a deep, exasperated sigh, the doctor reluctantly took heed of Nurse Genice's eager beckoning and trudged over to the ailing unfortunate as it waved a vestigial limb of some description at the cruelty of its situation. With a simple raising of two greying eyebrows, the doctor prompted the nurse to explain her summons. She stared for a moment, unable to frame anything which sounded less ludicrous than: "This patient needs medical attention, Doctor."

With an ironic grunt, the grizzled, irritable doctor bent over the patient and surveyed him. Whatever species he had originally been, although obviously largely humanoid, would take a post mortem to identify now. The remnants of obscene technological grafts were evident on his torso and the removal or truncation of his limbs suggested various former employments. The doctor reached into an inside pocket and produced a small, cylindrical device which, when pressed to the remains of the patient's forehead, immediately removed all traces of consciousness. Satisfied, the doctor straightened and addressed the concerned nurse.

"I used setting 2, so he may never wake up again. It's probably best that he doesn't, but if he does, he'd better hope there's a conscientious nurse like you around. Now I must get on," she said, before marching off down the aisle. She could feel Genice's admiring stare on her back and resented it.

Doing the tent rounds involved very little skill or medical knowledge. Through the corners of her eyes, Doctor Aceso could see a veritable army of nurses filing through adjacent aisles, alternately ministering to or ignoring the unfortunates either side. She made no eye contact, attempted no palliation unless a nurse waved her over. Nonetheless, in the hour it took her to complete a full sweep of the tent, she had dealt with dozens of wounded and drying creatures. Most would never leave until their final journey. Those who did would end up back in the war. She was very clear which ones were luckiest.

"Excuse me, Doctor. Do you have any Savlon?"

Aceso halted, the tent flap in her hand, and turned to see the owner of the surprisingly clear voice. He was sitting on the floor next to his bed, looking up at her with an engaging smile. The third thing Aceso noticed was the livid scar across one cheek, probably the result of a run-in with the enemy. The second thing was the familiar metal helmet and collar that framed his face. But it was the eyes that struck her first. Eyes that seemed to flicker from green to brown to purest black. It was as if they had looked into an abyss. They bored right into her, even as the young-old, prematurely lined and bearded face around them smiled pleasantly.

When Aceso didn't immediately answer, the patient added, "Maybe some E45 cream, then? I appear to have a rather nasty rash on my cheek."

The doctor approached the strange Roboman. She gave him a cursory examination, and then rattled off some standard questions: "Are you aware of your surroundings? Do

you know what is happening? Do you know who you are?"

"Oh yes," the Roboman answered, cheerfully. "This is some kind of field hospital for those of us injured in the Time War. As for who I am…" A sad smile settled onto his face. "I haven't really known that for some time."

Approaching, Nurse Genice was surprised to find the doctor in dialogue with a patient. Aceso spied her and demanded a piece of equipment which Genice soon brought. As the patient's head was scanned by the doctor, he remarked, "I can save you the bother of making a diagnosis. The thing's knackered. A bit like me."

"So you're not a Roboman any more?" asked Genice. "You have your memories back?"

"Only bits and pieces," replied the man. "And most of them are unwelcome."

Aceso finished scanning and nodded in mixed satisfaction and irritation. "You should never have got past triage. There's nothing wrong with you. Nurse, get him out of here."

"I might be able to offer some assistance," suggested the ex-Roboman. "I may not know much, but I know a fair bit about exobiology and time trauma."

Doctor Aceso looked at him again with renewed interest. "You were a medical man?" she asked.

"I suppose I must have been, once," replied the patient. Doctor Aceso considered briefly, picturing the overworked faces of her colleagues, before holding out her hand to him. He accepted it and pulled himself up to stand opposite her.

"My name's Aceso, but for the moment, you can call me Doctor." The new recruit smiled as if at a private joke.

"Well then, 'Doctor', all things considered," he replied "until you get this blasted thing off my head and discharge me, you'd better call me 'Patient'."

Nearby, someone started screaming and Genice hurried to his side. Patient followed her with his eyes, but Aceso was already glancing at her watch. "Let me show you what we're dealing with," she began as she left the tent only to find herself alone. Once again, she entered the tent and found her new colleague kneeling by Genice's charge.

"What's wrong?" he asked. Surprised to be addressed, Genice responded, "His body's going into shock again. All I can do is try to make him comfortable."

Patient turned his attention to the nurse for a moment. "What's your name?" he enquired. "Genice. Gen for short," she replied, and was rewarded by a slight smile and a faraway look. "Thank you, Gen," the strange man said before turning back to the dying hybrid on the bed.

Patient's eyes looked deep into the soldier's single eye. His facial tentacles twitched feebly and his scarred external brain oozed white pus. From the neck down, he had a humanoid body, with any visible areas covered in alarmingly pulsing veins. "It's alright," said Patient calmly. "You're going to be alright." The hybrid seemed to relax, then Doctor

Aceso pressed his device to its head and it slipped into unconsciousness.

Standing, Patient raised an eyebrow. “Was that necessary?” Aceso returned the stare belligerently. “Look around you,” she commanded. As she swept her eyes around the tent, her gaze encompassed a variety of abominations that would have made HP Lovecraft whimper. Hybrids originating from dozens of planets, half-crazed Robomen, force-mutated mounds of pain rejecting their half-destroyed mechanical prostheses and time-distorted semi-corpses from unidentifiable races … Patient had to concede Aceso’s unspoken point. There was little a Doctor could do here. And this was only one tent.

“Come along,” Aceso said, gently. “I’ll take you into The Hospital.”

The two weary medics left the tent and made their way to the impossible building that dominated the sky. Patient turned his head to and fro, trying to take everything in despite the extent to which his helmet restricted his peripheral vision. Then they entered The Hospital and it became clear that the squalor that characterised the overflow shanty towns of makeshift beds they had just left behind was not restricted to the world outside. They traversed corridors in contrasting architectural styles, opening onto an improbable number of vast wards. But wherever they went, each one was paved with the sick and dying.

“Do you remember anything about the battle when you were injured?” asked Aceso as they walked past a shapeless reptilian creature in a stasis tank. Patient thought for a while before answering. “I think I’ve seen many battles. I’ve got memories in here I don’t know what to do with. Worlds perishing in flames. Bowships slicing through Dalek warships. I saw the birthing of the Final Pathogen. And I saw good men and women exterminated in front of my face.”

They fell silent, the dignity of the moment marred by the need to step over a drooling Ogron, his hands clenching reflexively and his eyes fixed upon a horizon inside his own mind.

“You seem a little... weathered for a Roboman,” commented Aceso after a decent pause. “The Daleks tend to choose younger and younger men these days. How long have you been fighting in the war?” Patient smiled and fixed the doctor with an unblinking look.

“I was twenty six last birthday,” he said. “That’s the Time War for you.”

Aceso regarded him quizzically. It wasn’t just the face - he could have been anything from mid-thirties to early-fifties. It was the voice as well, one rich and gravelly as if belonging to a much older man. She doubted his assertion, but somehow thought better than to question it.

“Now I have a question for you,” he continued as they manoeuvred themselves up a flight of stairs which flipped unnaturally after a few steps and led to a floor that hadn’t appeared to exist. “What made you want to work in a hospital dedicated to treating the Daleks’ allies?”

Aceso abruptly came to a halt in the stairwell. As Patient turned to look at the doctor, she appeared to be standing on the ceiling, while her face unsettlingly glared from

its usual upright position.

"My species had our planet devastated in the early years of the Time War. The survivors, my ancestors, reacted by becoming a race of humanitarians. We set up this hospital. At first, we tried to help both sides, but that proved unwise. Extensive rebuilding was required."

"So you picked sides."

"We did not." Aceso joined Patient at the top of the flight, which came as a great relief to his vestibular system. "We are strictly neutral in this senseless carnage. All we can hope to do is patch up the wounded or at least help them to die as painlessly as possible. Now take a look in here," she added, striding through a fair of doors which slid open at her approach.

Patient stopped dead in the doorway, suppressing an urge to duck or attack. Immediately inside, a Dalek eyestalk boggled at him as its top section swivelled to take him in. It began to move towards him and he straightened, determined to show himself unafraid. When it stopped with a jerking motion, he noticed for the first time that it was connected to the wall by a series of hoses and clamps. Belatedly, he also realised that its gunstalk was missing. It tried to speak to him, but only a guttural bleating emerged.

The immediate threat relieved, he took in the rest of the chamber. Daleks of various shapes, colours and vintages lined the walls while medical personnel busied themselves around them. Some were missing parts of their shells, occasionally exposing the mutants within; with others, the damage was less obvious. On each, the gunstick had been removed. Aceso saw his companion staring at an empty socket and smiled thinly. "We're not idiots," she said.

"That's a matter of opinion," he retorted, as a fire-damaged Dalek clocked him and, like the first, moved a short distance towards him before coming to an enforced halt. It began to croak and the noises formed syllables: "Doc…tor…"

Doctor Aceso frowned. "Some sort of focussing malfunction?" she wondered, stepping further into the Dalek's field of vision. It swerved aside to stare at the ageing Roboman again. "Doc…tor…" it said again. "You…you…"

Swiftly, the Patient sped forward past the Dalek and twisted a dial on one of the hoses attached to its shell. It gurgled, eyestalk sinking as anaesthetic flowed into its bloodstream. Aceso's expression of astonishment and outrage was almost comical: "What the hell do you think you are doing? That is a patient!"

"Wrong. *I* am a patient. *That* is a homicidal maniac in an armoured tank!" Losing his cool, the man tore off his Roboman helmet and threw it to one side. "I don't think you can possibly understand the danger you've put yourselves in here!"

"Danger? This hospital has been running without serious incident for decades – possibly centuries, it's hard to tell. What threat did that Dalek pose? He's got no weaponry, he's tied to a wall and he's surrounded by people who mean him no harm!"

With an effort, Patient tried to force himself to keep calm. “Try to imagine a creature for whom hate is as intrinsic as carbon is for you. Imagine that everything you do, every kindness, just gives the Dalek one more reason to exterminate you.”

Aceso shook her head. “You’re wrong. Look, I know all the monstrous things the Daleks have done, believe me. But here at the hospital, we’re safe. I’ll show you.”

With that, the doctor strode across to a locked compartment which opened following a swift DNA scan. She removed a Dalek gunstick, aimed it at Patient and fired. He flinched as the weapon whirred into life, emitting its deadly radiation flare then… nothing. With a satisfied expression, Aceso let the gun drop to her side.

The implications dawned. “We’re in a state of temporal grace.” he said, shock evident in his voice. Turning on Aceso in mild indignation he protested “That’s *our* technology! What are you doing with it?”

Now it was the doctor’s turn to be shocked. “You’re a Time Lord?” She approached the defiant infiltrator heatedly. “No wonder the Dalek reacted that way to you! You are not welcome here!”

“And you claim not to have taken sides?” It came across not as a sneer, but as a gentle admonishment. “The Daleks have massacred millions of my people, destroyed countless planets, and yet you…”

“That’s a very selective view of this war of yours,” scoffed Doctor Aceso. “How many of the Daleks have been murdered by you Time Lords? How many of their servants, slaves, allies? How many planets have fallen to Time Lord fire power? And how dare you attempt to take the moral high ground?”

Suddenly, the lights dimmed appreciably. Aceso frowned. “That shouldn’t happen,” she muttered. Even as she spoke, a number of permanently drugged Daleks began to revive. The electro-magnetic clamps which affixed many of them to their berths twanged open, allowing those with less severe damage to trundle groggily forward. Aceso dashed to one of the wall-mounted interfaces and the Time Lord saw an expression of disbelief and horror settle on her face.

“Let me guess,” he offered. “Someone has hacked into your computer systems and taken control of the hospital.” Aceso nodded, ashen-faced. “No-one should be able to do this. Our defences are second to none!”

“Correction,” snapped the doctor’s erstwhile colleague. “Your defences are precisely none. You’ve been hosting several-dozen technological genii disguised as drooling metal hard luck cases. Clearly, at least one of them retained sufficient capability to work its way past your defences. I expect it took a while – but how long have they been here?”

Darting across the room to hit the alarm, Aceso retorted: “I suppose it’s just coincidence that they cracked the case just as you turned up to ruffle their feathers?” The Dalek nearest to the doorway glided between Aceso and the alarm-button. The Time Lord shook his head gently. “I suspect they bypassed your defences some time ago. They were waiting for something. Whatever that was, now that they’ve seen me, they’ve brought

their plans forward."

Casting medical ethics to one side, Doctor Aceso grabbed the obstructive Dalek and pushed it across the room, where it spun helplessly and crashed into a medical trolley. "It doesn't matter. They're helpless! They don't even have weaponry!" She slammed her hand into the alarm and whitened at the silence that followed. The Dalek's eyestalk surveyed her for a moment, then the creature bleated triumphantly as it turned to look at the open compartment across the room.

Dalek gunsticks flew from storage and attached themselves to their recovering owners. Aceso started as the gun she'd forgotten she was carrying yanked itself out of her grasp. With a chilling click it slotted itself into place on the casing of the Dalek she had shoved. It let out a four-syllabed croak and fired a blast of deadly radiation towards the doctor.

Aceso hit the floor with her former patient on top of her as the window behind them shattered. "So much for temporal grace," he commented, extracting a thin metal cylinder from his pocket and using it to emit a sonic wave. The nearby electro-magnetic clamp sprang into operation again, pulling the Dalek's aim off just enough to allow the two to flee through the door. They were joined by those of the medical staff lucky enough to escape the barrage of gunfire which now lit up the ward. The Time Lord grabbed Aceso by the lapel as the doctors and nurses ran for the impossible staircase.

"Quick question. How many Daleks?"

"Maybe four, five hundred in total. But not all…"

"What floor are we on?"

"The fifth. But that doesn't…"

The doctor found herself being pulled along the corridor away from the stairs at a run, reaching a dead end. Her companion began pointing his sonic device at the wall. "If I can just loosen these … .Duck!"

A Dalek ray flew past their arms and hit the loosened bricks, which flew outwards into the sky beyond. The Time Lord took one glance behind at the small group of mostly functional Daleks emerging into the corridor, grabbed Aceso and, despite her protestations, leapt out into mid-air.

In the seconds immediately following this manoeuvre, several things became clear. The first was that thanks to the unique architecture of The Hospital, the fifth floor was more than five floors up. The Time Lord estimated that the equivalent of twenty or thirty floors stood between their current unsupported position and the canvas safety net of the tent city below. For a brief moment, he felt a curious mix of terror and embarrassment before the nature of local gravity became clear. The two figures fell quickly, slowly, quickly again – depending on the relationship of the nearest section of The Hospital with time and space.

As they floated in slow motion through an especially sludgy piece of air, Aceso

grabbed her companion's sleeve and yelled, "Look!" Hundreds of familiar shapes were advancing towards The Hospital through the air. As momentum caught up with them again, Aceso had time to yell "They've switched off the security barriers!" before they hit the canvas, which ripped under their weight and deposited them on top of an ailing Ogron.

Inside the tent there was chaos. People were screaming and running; corpses decked the aisles. Robomen and other technologically augmented humanoids were attacking everyone around them to varying degrees of success. From where she stood, Aceso could see one Roboman efficiently blasting down fleeing nurses with an adapted Laserson probe, while another, whose legs had been blasted away, was doggedly pulling himself along the ground in pursuit of anything that moved.

The Time Lord picked himself up. "I'm getting too old for this," he muttered, before ordering Aceso to evacuate everyone as quickly as possible. "You're asking me to evacuate a small city in less than five minutes!" responded the doctor. "It can't be done, but there could be another way!"

Leaving her companion with the choice to follow or not, Aceso turned and headed for the tent door, just as it caught fire. The Time Lord remained in hot pursuit until a scream stopped him. He turned around to see a young woman in danger. She was crouched on the floor, using her arms to shield her head from a former patient, a cyborg whose own arm was raised and clutching the leg of another patient. In a fraction of a second that seemed like a lifetime, the Time Lord stared at the young nurse and fought back the tide of déjà vu forcing him to recall other young women he'd seen terrorised by various alien creatures. He'd met her before, earlier. Her name was Jen, or something.

Genice waited for the killing blow but it didn't come. She parted her arms to see the elderly former Roboman holding out his hand for her. As he helped her up, she saw his other hand toss something to one side that looked rather like a robotic brain. "Run!" he ordered, and hand-in-hand they stepped across the cyborg's dormant body and headed through the flaming exit.

"Where are we going?" yelled Genice over the noise as her rescuer headed for the main door. "Doctor Aceso ran this way," came the reply. "She said there could be a way to … ."

In that moment, the noise increased, but changed. An oscillating high-pitched whine arose almost subliminally in the Time Lord's ears and the screams from the people in the tents were replaced by their attackers' screams. He looked up sharply, then yanked Genice into the entrance just in time to avoid the Daleks from the ward, who had been flying out of the hole in the wall, smashing into the ground where they'd been standing. In the near distance, they could see the approaching army of Daleks similarly nosediving into the ground. Within half a minute, the strange oscillating whine was the only sound.

They found Aceso in a usually secure room, its various barriers having been switched off by the Daleks or unlocked by the Doctor. She was sitting within a grey cube, slumped on the only item of furniture it housed - an uncomfortable-looking stool. One wall was dominated by a series of computer banks, most of them clearly far in advance of the

technology elsewhere in The Hospital. Aceso looked up at them and smiled weakly. “Did it work?” she asked.

Genice flew to the doctor’s side as the Time Lord ignored both of them and stared at the controls. “They all just crashed to the ground!” she confirmed. “Did you do that with this…?” She waved a hand at the computer banks, unable to frame a coherent phrase. Aceso simply nodded.

“Temporal grace!” Aceso and Genice turned at the sound of the man’s voice. “Impenetrable security barriers! And now this – that noise – a transverse disruption signal?” He glared at the wall as if mesmerised. “This is Gallifreyan technology! This is … .”

The penny dropped in an instant and both his hands flew to his temples in a surprisingly theatrical gesture. “Of course!” He turned to stare at the mystified medics.

“I’ve been here before!”

Their reactions faded into the background as he re-familiarised himself with the controls. He could picture himself now, young, arrogant, so sure he was doing the right thing. *Soon get this set up for you …won’t have any more problems with unwelcome visitors. Pass me the sonic screwdriver, Peri…* . A different life. A more compassionate life.

He became aware of his companions and drifted back to the present. “I visited this planet before. Years ago. You were having problems with the Knights of Bizli – a bunch of murderous robots, died out hundreds of years ago now. Anyway, I decided to share a little Time Lord technology with you. I thought it would protect you, keep you safe.”

“Well, it worked,” said Aceso, pulling herself off her chair. “Although we never knew this was Gallifreyan. But it’s your technology that’s kept us safe all these years, quite apart from dealing with the Dalek threat.”

She stepped back despite herself as the Time Lord turned on her. “Is that what you think? They’re dealt with? You can’t keep the signal going all the time and they know how to hack into your systems now.”

“But they’re all dead!” protested Genice. “You saw them, they were smashed all over the place!”

“They weren’t all in the air. Those on the ground will recover in time. And that’s before we take their unpleasant friends into consideration. Also … .” He had been fiddling with one of the control panels and, at this stage, with a flourish flicked a switch which caused a hologram to occupy the centre of the room. “Take a look at that!”

The hologram showed the planet, with the enormous hospital visible on one side. The Time Lord was pointing at an area to the south, where the land mass was unnaturally grey. “There shouldn’t be anything there!” said Aceso, startled. “The whole planet’s deserted except for this immediate area!”

Quietly, the Time Lord asked: “Where do you think the Daleks go when you discharge them?”

Breaking the stunned silence that followed, he continued. “No doubt you ship them off somewhere and, once past the transduction barriers I set up, they wouldn’t be able to find their way back again. Goodness knows I had trouble. But all it would take is one Dalek. One foot soldier. One overlooked Dalek would be enough to overrun your planet, given enough time. That signal will have stunned the whole lot of them for a time, but they’ll be back.”

The doctor shook herself into life. “If what you say is true, we need to evacuate the entire hospital. We have preparations in place. We’ll move the whole operation to a new planet and begin again. Nurse, get the word out. I’ll talk to the chiefs of staff.”

Once Aceso had left, the Time Lord warrior sighed to himself as he looked back at the computer banks. “I thought it would protect you. Keep you safe.”

“Is everything alright?” He was surprised to see Gen still there, looking at him anxiously. “Yes, of course, my dear. I just need to make some adjustments.” His hands were a blur as they moved across the controls, then he stepped back with an air of finality.

“What did you do?” she asked.

“Well, first I reversed the polarity…” he replied, as a wisp of smoke started to emerge from one of the computer banks, “and, to cut a long story short … I’ve blown the thing up.” Now smoke was positively billowing from the wall. Genice looked on in horror as the Time Lord calmly turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

He heard the uproar before he even reached the main doors. The screams and explosions were even noisier than they had been during the Dalek assault. He exited The Hospital and surveyed the scene. Flickering, monochrome fire was descending from the heavens to exterminate the inhabitants of the tent city. He watched a Dalek/human hybrid run screeching from the tent, its entire body melting until its deformed skeleton crumbled onto the ground. Invisible blasts, like deadly, accelerating bubbles, thumped into doctors, nurses and patients alike, causing them to age forwards or backwards within seconds, finishing dead either way. A population of thousands of Dalek servants and collaborators was being eliminated before his eyes.

“What have you done? What did you do?” Gen was beside him, gazing in horror at the massacre in front of her. The warrior merely indicated upwards, where featureless obelisks of varying sizes were hovering in the sky, raining death upon their enemies. “Battle TARDISes,” he explained. “I destroyed the equipment, which disabled the transduction barriers and allowed my people to gain access.”

The nurse couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “But you gave my people that equipment! You saved us, centuries ago! Now you’ve brought us to extinction?” His expression barely flickered.

“People change,” he murmured.

A particular TARDIS, gliding nearer, caught his eye. He turned to look at Gen, though not in the eye. “This is a Dalek planet. The Time War cannot end until one side annihilates the other. I can’t allow the Daleks to win.”

The nurse looked back at him in disbelief. “There’s got to be another way!”

He pressed a control on the ersatz Roboman collar he still wore around his neck. Genice reacted in astonishment as he began to float up into the air, until she realised the TARDIS had locked its tractor beam onto him and was drawing him in. Helpless, she stood in the doorway of the universe’s largest hospital as the Time Lord ships started blasting it to pieces.

The Time Lord warrior surveyed the one-sided battlefield as he rose into the air above it all. In the far distance, he could see Battle TARDISes blasting the still-dormant Dalek armies into oblivion. Below him, he saw Doctor Aceso run out of the hospital and shout something at Nurse Genice. She pointed up at the retreating Patient and they were both looking up at him when a Battle TARDIS scored a direct hit on the doorway and both were blasted into atoms. He felt the nausea rise in him. *A mercy killing*.

He closed his eyes. He could hear Doctor Aceso in his mind: *“How many planets have fallen to Time Lord fire power? And how dare you attempt to take the moral high ground?”* And Gen: *“You saved us, centuries ago! Now you’ve brought us to extinction?”* And he was reminded of another meeting with another young girl, such a long time ago. Words spoken by another man: *“Look on the bright side, I’m not a Dalek!” “Who can tell the difference any more?”*

Standing in the door of the Battle TARDIS, the warrior opened his eyes and took one last look at the latest battleground in the Time War. As he turned his back on the planet he had once saved, he realised that he knew the answer to Cass’s question.

“There is no difference. Not any more.”

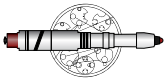
At the console, nine Time Lords in full battle armour, hearing his words, looked across at him.

“Lord Doctor,” said Runcible, her waist-long auburn hair fluttering gently in the breeze from the Battle TARDIS’ open doors. “Did you say something?”

“I’m not a Doctor.” he replied. “I am a patient. And I’m discharging myself.”

Runcible looked to the others, uncertain of how to respond. Her General saved her the bother.

“Take me to my TARDIS.” he said.



Your Move

by John Peel

Grandmother Ayaka,

I've sent in my official report about the mission to Karadis 4589 (knowing you, you've probably read it by now), but there were a few details I was forced to leave out that I thought you should hear directly from me. I ran into an old friend of yours in the hell-hole, and he seemed very pleased to hear that you've done so well for yourself. "Vice Admiral, indeed?" he said. "Who'd have thought it?" But I should tell you this in some sort of order so you can make sense of it – if there's any sense to be made out of anything in this war.

We weren't old much when we were sent in to 4589, just that we were to rendezvous with a Gallifreyan and that he would give us our orders. I wasn't happy, I can tell you – those Time Lords are an aloof bunch, difficult to warm to, and pretty much impossible to like. I didn't expect this one to be so… different.

4589 was a dump – the Daleks had bombed it, then we had bombed it to try and dislodge the Daleks, and they had fought back. They dug in, brought in a whole battalion of Special Weapons and kept most of our attacking force pinned down. They ringed the planet with death satellites, and booby-trapped a bunch of asteroids on the approach routes. The Daleks clearly wanted that planet badly for some reason, and that meant we wanted to take it from them even worse. At least, I assumed that was the official thinking.

There were just six of us in a small raider. I had no idea what we would be expected to do that would have any significance against a Dalek-held planet when an entire invasion force was getting nowhere, but you don't get anywhere in the military by asking questions. We just went in.

It wasn't that simple, of course. The killer asteroids almost got us, and then the death satellites zeroed in on us. Our pilot, Chara, is one of the best, and even he almost couldn't make this run. We were shaken about plenty, and the ship was holed in a dozen places – thankfully none fatally – by the time we made atmosphere. And then it got bad. Ground batteries opened up on us, and a couple of saucers zeroed in on our flight path. Thankfully, we had some support from our ground forces, and even more thankfully, we had Chara. We managed to shoot down one of the saucers with a few lucky shots, and we lost the other by flying through the wreckage of an old city. Then we were at our target

zone, and Chara put us down fast and hard. The Daleks would probably locate us again in a few hours, but I could only hope that would give us time to do whatever it was we were supposed to.

There was movement in the otherwise lifeless rubble – the entire planet was grey and free of any kind of vegetation or water. I had assumed it was because of the fighting, but it turned out I was wrong. Seeing the movement, my squad was ready to annihilate whatever it might be when the Time Lord stepped out, his hands up.

You can't trust anything or anyone in this war, and I sure as hell wasn't going to trust a Gallifreyan. He could have been robotized, or booby-trapped. Kemba scanned him and then said "He's safe."

"Hardly that," the Time Lord muttered, stepping forward. "And I have a friend with me." He gestured, and a tall man stepped into sight. He was good-looking, but his right arm was hidden in some sort of sling. Kemba scanned him, and then scowled.

"I don't get any life readings at all."

"You won't," the Time Lord said. "He's a robot. Very sophisticated, intelligent and self-aware. But a robot."

Kemba had his rifle raised. "That thing could have almost anything hidden inside it," he objected. "I can't scan it properly. We should destroy it just to be safe."

"You were sent here, were you not, to assist me?" the Gallifreyan asked. "He's here to assist us all. If you blow him up, you may as well go home right now." He eyed the sky, which was illuminated from time to time with flares of explosions. "If you can."

The decision was mine, of course. I was tempted to follow Kemba's advice, but couldn't. We *did* have orders. "Stow it, Kemba," I told him. "We'll trust the Time Lord – for now."

The Gallifreyan inclined his head. He looked battered and weary, a young-old face, a dark beard flecked with white, wearing a long threadbare beaten-up coat that seemed to belong to another man and a bandolier across his chest. Yet there was a kind of vitality about him that somehow came through the exhausted exterior. "Thank you, young lady. And you would be…?"

"Squad Leader Dyoni," I informed him.

"Dyoni?" He blinked rapidly. "I've known a couple of Thals by that name. Who's your family?" That's when your name came up, and he made his remarks.

"You know my grandmother?" I asked him.

"I knew her once. A lifetime ago. I'm not the man I once was; I doubt she'd remember me. I suppose you were named for her fallen friend." He rubbed his hands together. "Well, enough about the past – let's get on with the present." He wouldn't tell me his name, but he said you might know it. Maybe you could tell it to me someday.

We hunkered down together in the burned-out wreckage of what had once been a

large city. The robot joined us, nursing its injured arm. I wondered if it could feel anything like pain. The Time Lord looked at us and sighed.

"This planet was once home to the Movellan race," he informed us. He gestured at the robot. "My friend e Hhere is one of the last survivors – there are only a handful scattered about the Galaxy after their ill-fated war with the Daleks. But this cold, sterile place was once a thriving metropolis. Only robotic life existed here – there must have been a humanoid race at one time, and plants and animals, but they were wiped out and built over millennia ago. Even the Movellans themselves have no stories about their creators – I suspect they were embarrassed about being constructed by humanoids and wiped that information from their databases. The Movellans are creatures of strict logic and high intelligence. Here in what is left of their capital lies one of the great achievements – their War Computer.

"The War Computer contains all of the intelligence they were able to amass about the Daleks, and it evolved plans to fight and destroy them. Now the Daleks have virtually wiped out the Movellan race, they are here to destroy the great computer so that no one else can ever use it against them."

Kemba grinned. "And we're here to stop them, eh – all six of us?"

"Well, there are eight of us, actually," the Time Lord said mildly. "And you'd think that would be our mission, wouldn't you? But you'd be wrong. We're actually here to ensure that they succeed." He gave a wan smile. "Ironically, our mission is to help the Daleks."

It was my turn to scowl. "That doesn't make any sense at all."

"Actually," the robot said, speaking for the first time, "it does." The voice was pleasant, but firm. If these machines were built in the image of their makers, then their makers must have been an impressive race. "If the War Computer is allowed to exist, then some alien race may find it and seek to use it."

"And how would that be a bad thing?" Chara wanted to know. "It's programmed to help defeat the Daleks, isn't it?"

"For the moment," the Time Lord agreed. "But – imagine if the Sontarans or the Rutans got their hands – or tentacles – on it. Isn't it more likely that they'd reprogram it to help out in their own wars? That they'd turn on each other?" He waved his hand toward the sky. "There are a thousand thousand races out there that would use it in their own petty conflicts rather than against the Daleks. It's far too dangerous to allow it to exist."

I began to see his point. One thing I have learned in life is that people can be incredibly selfish and blinded by their own hatreds and fears – quite enough for them to ignore a greater evil to fight against something small that they simply dislike. I could understand what he meant, and could even agree with him. This computer was dangerous, and we and the Daleks for once had the same goal in mind. The irony of it didn't escape me.

"So what do we do?" I asked him.

"For the moment, we wait," the Gallifreyan said. "Your arrival stirred the Daleks up, so we'd better let them calm down a bit. Then he –" he nodded toward the robot – "will lead us into the vault entrance to the computer."

I can tell you it was rather odd, sitting there in that wrecked room with a Time Lord, a robot and my squad, while the Daleks patrolled the area. They even used Ogrons and some of the Robotized captives, but, thankfully, neither of those are noted for their intelligence. We had to duck under cover once or twice, but as the time passed, the search grew more remote.

I tried to talk to the Time Lord, but he wasn't exactly the chatty type. "My grandmother told me of meeting one of your race," I said at one point. "He was called the Doctor. Do you know him?"

"I knew him," was the terse reply. "He's not been seen for a long, long time."

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"He's… gone." He looked up at me. "You know, I quite liked him, but he was very naïve and oh so optimistic. War grinds down people like that very quickly. You'd better hope it doesn't grind *you* down."

"I'll do my duty," I replied. "We all will."

"Duty," he said, with a deep sigh. "Yes, we all do that." He lapsed into silence again. He didn't speak for quite some time and then he said: "I think we'd better start now. The patrols have thinned out."

I nodded and prepared my people. The robot moved silently to its feet and scanned the ruined city. "That way," it said, gesturing with its good hand. Kemba and I led the way, Chara bringing up the rear. The other four formed up about the Time Lord and the robot. The Gallifreyan had a frag rifle, but the robot didn't appear to be armed at all. I wondered how much it could be trusted, but there was no way of knowing what was going on in its mind.

We moved out, slowly and carefully. We all knew that Daleks liked to leave traps behind, as well as such delights as Slythers and Varga plants to protect their rear. But my people are good, and take as few chances as possible. We may not have moved swiftly, but there was little need for speed and much need for caution. We detected and avoided a number of traps as we crossed that blighted city scape. All the time, too, saucers and Daleks on hoverbouts passed overhead, and Ogron and Robo Patrols scoured the streets.

"They're using a lot of resources to hunt for us," Kemba said, grinning.

"Not just us," the Time Lord said. "They're looking for the War Computer, remember?"

"This amount of activity suggests that they haven't yet found it," the Movellan pointed out.

"Have we?" asked the Time Lord.

The robot paused. “I’m overlaying a map of the city as it was onto the landscape we can see.” It gestured toward a slight indent in the ground not too far from us. “There is an entrance to the War Room over there – if it’s not buried under too much rubble.”

“You find it, we’ll get through anything in the way,” I promised it. It nodded.

We moved out cautiously. We were slipping through a dusty street when I happened to turn around at just the right moment to see the Time Lord deliberately leave a footprint in the dust. I brought my rifle up and covered him. To my surprise, he didn’t seem to be particularly bothered that he was seconds away from death. He just looked at me, and there was no evidence of guilt in that tired stare.

“I saw what you did,” I hissed.

He shrugged. “I wasn’t particularly hiding it.”

“Do you have an explanation for that?” I gestured at the print. “Or should I just shoot you now?”

He sighed. “I *told* you that the Daleks want to destroy the War Computer – but first they have to find it. The best way for them to do that is to follow us. I’m just making it easier for them.”

“And if they find us *before* we get to the computer?” I asked him.

“That would be unfortunate for us.”

“That would be *fatal* for us,” I corrected him.

“Yes,” he agreed. “All of us. Believe me, they would simply love to kill me – they’ve been trying it for a long, long time.” He sighed again. “Look, Dyoni, I *like* you, but we have a job to do, and if you die doing it… Well, I’ll get over it. I always do. I liked your Grandmother, but I got her into quite a lot of hot water. People who hang around me tend to get into serious trouble. Sometimes it’s not my fault. Sometimes it is. It’s the nature of war that people get hurt, or even die. I don’t like it, but I’ve had to accept it. The harsh truth is that you’re here because you and your squad are considered expendable. Oh, I’m sure that Thal High Command would be happy if you got back alive and healthy, but if you don’t – well, fortunes of war. Your grandmother will get a very apologetic letter and, if she’s lucky, a few of your remains. You might get awarded a posthumous medal, and that will be it. If I die here… Well, that’s happened before, and I’ve gotten better.” He gave me another of his wan smiles. “I’m both more and less fortunate than you in that respect. But that’s enough philosophy for now – if you’re going to shoot me, then shoot me. Otherwise, let’s get on with the mission, shall we? Before they do find us?”

I didn’t know quite what to make of this sudden loquaciousness from the Time Lord, but I could see the logic in some of what he had said. I lowered my rifle and nodded, and we set off again. Some of what he’d said hadn’t made much sense, but there’s long been rumours about the Time Lords having more than one life. That Doctor that you met, for example – he’s had at least four different faces that we Thals know about, and I couldn’t help suspecting that I was looking at a fifth, despite his claims that he wasn’t the Doctor. I

just hoped his plan was confusing the Daleks half as much as it was confusing me.

As we were drawing close to the entrance to the underground bunker, our luck ran out. I heard a cry of alarm and then shots began falling all about us. A small Ogron patrol had spotted us and given the alert. We fired back, and three of the beasts fell, wounded or dead. At the same time, though, Kemba gave a cry and crashed to the ground behind what was left of a retaining wall. I started to turn to check on him, but the Time Lord grabbed my arm.

"We're under attack," he growled. "We have to go forward, not back."

I hesitated – Kemba was my friend as well as my second, and the thought of leaving him was sickening. But the Gallifreyan was right – I couldn't endanger the rest of my squad or the mission to go back and see if Kemba was dead. Reluctantly, I nodded, and we plunged onward, into the small defile in the road that the robot claimed hid the entrance to the Computer's complex. My squad scattered into what cover there was. The Time Lord slipped in next to me, and we all fired on the advancing Ogrons. Over his shoulder, my companion called: "The faster you can work, the better."

"I will endeavor to speed it up," the robot promised. Using its one good arm, it ripped up some of the fallen metallic wall, and exposed a few steps leading downward. "I have the codes, if the locks are still operating." The rest of us defended our position as best we could. Ogrons aren't the smartest or most accurate soldiers in the universe, but they're too stupid to ever stop while they were alive, and they were far more afraid of the Daleks than they were of death. Plus, they'd had ample time by now to call for reinforcements.

"You may have left a few too many tracks," I muttered to my companion.

He gave me another thin smile. "Yes, it's often been said that I tend to overdo things." He took careful aim and shot down an Ogron who was trying to get closer to our position. "How is it coming?" he called to the Movellan.

"Almost finished," came the reply. "The mechanism has jammed. The lock is open, but the door is proving reluctant to move."

"I think we're running out of options," I said, gesturing to the north. Above the rubble we could see a Dalek saucer gliding forward. "I really hope that War Room is well-lined."

"I'm sure it is," the Time Lord said. "The Movellans were really rather efficient."

As if to punctuate his comment, the robot called: "I'm in!"

"In there, now!" I ordered, and everyone dived for the stairwell. The Time Lord brought up the rear.

"Go in!" he called. "I'll lock it behind us! Ogrons aren't good at picking locks."

At the bottom of the stairs was an open doorway, the metal door warped and virtually torn down. The robot was certainly strong. Beyond it were three more doors that then led into a corridor where the Movellan awaited us. "This way," it said, leading us

further into the complex.

The Time Lord caught up with us after a few moments. “Even the Daleks will have trouble getting through those doors,” he said, cheerfully. “We’ve bought ourselves a fair amount of time.”

“Then there had better be a back door to this place,” I said drily. “We aren’t going out the front.”

“I’m sure there is,” he replied. “As I said, the Movellans were really rather efficient.”

We followed our tame Movellan down the corridor. Some doors were open, showing mostly storage rooms. There was no sign of life – not even the robotic, Movellan kind.

Something occurred to me. “Why is this place deserted?” I asked the Time Lord. “It appears to be in fairly good shape – surely they would have made a last stand here?”

“Robotic logic,” he replied. “The place is pretty automated, using the same sort of positronic brains the Movellans themselves have. It didn’t need manning – or should that be *roboting*? The troops were needed elsewhere, so they shifted them. They always intended to return – despite their love of logic, they didn’t ever really believe they’d lose their war. It caught them by surprise.”

We had reached the end of the corridor, which terminated in double doors. The robot held up a hand, and one of its fingers extruded some kind of a probe, which it inserted into the locking mechanism. For several long moments nothing happened, and then the robot withdrew the probe. With a soft sigh, the doors slid apart and we entered the War Room.

It wasn’t as large as I’d expected – nor as impressive. It was about thirty paces long and the same wide. The far wall had a large screen on it, currently powered down. In the centre of the floor was a mechanism that looked like an inverted pyramid. Nothing else was visible.

“It’s a bit bare,” Chara muttered.

“Not too impressive,” I agreed.

“Robots,” the Rime Lord reminded us. “There’s no logic in frills and floral arrangements. All that’s here is what is absolutely necessary. Dyoni, perhaps you’d better have a couple of your men guard the corridor behind us. We wouldn’t want any Daleks tip-toeing up behind us, would we?”

“There is no need for that, Time Lord,” the Movellan said. It slipped its injured arm from the sling, and I saw that it wasn’t injured at all – the hand no longer existed. It had been replaced by a rather powerful-looking blaster. “You will all place your weapons against the wall and then line up below the screen, where I can watch you.” When we didn’t move, it added: “Or I could just shoot you all now. I assure you, my reflexes are superb, and I could kill all six of you before any of you got off a shot.”

“And he’s not bluffing about that,” the Time Lord said. “You’d better do as he says,

Dyoni – there's no point in dying here and now."

"Robots!" I spat. "You can't trust them."

"Apparently not." The Gallifreyan didn't seem too concerned, just tired. We did as ordered and shuffled over to stand below the big screen. "Really, though, I am rather surprised and disappointed. I had hoped he was telling me the truth when he said he'd help."

"I *am* helping, Time Lord," the Movellan said. It had extruded the probe again and interfaced with the computer. The gun-arm was covering us unwaveringly. Robots didn't tire. "I am helping my people. I am reprogramming the War Computer."

"And this is precisely why I wanted it destroyed," the Time Lord complained. "People using it for their own ends, distracting from the real war that's going on." He blinked and asked mildly: "May I enquire precisely what you intend to use it for? Your people are long dead."

"Not all of them," the robot corrected him. "There is still a great fleet in hiding. Since the fall of this home world, we have needed a new one. The Computer will select the most useful choice and then we shall take it over. With fresh factories to build positronic brains and our casings, the Movellan race will grow once again. Whilst you and the Daleks destroy one another, we shall bide our time and then re-emerge to take over the remnants of the war."

"Oh dear, I *had* hoped it was nothing so hopeless," the Time Lord said with a sigh. "What a pity."

"Don't worry, Time Lord – there is no need for me to kill any of you." The robot continued its work. "Once my signal is sent, I will set you all free again and you can scuttle off back to your precious war."

"Then Dyoni was right?" the Gallifreyan persisted. "There *is* a back door out of here?"

In response, a section of the wall to our left slid aside. "That is it," the robot said. "The tunnel will let you out a good distance from the Ogrons." The screen above our heads suddenly lit up, and a string of indecipherable graphics and pictures scrolled across it. "And now my signal has been sent, alerting the fleet that the War Computer is back on line. I can begin to reprogram it."

My companion sighed again. "I wish I could be as generous with you as you were going to be with us," he said. "Believe me, I'm truly sorry about this."

"About what?" the Movellan asked. Then its head exploded and it slid to the floor.

In the doorway behind it stood Kemba, his gun smoking slightly. "About this," he said, grinning.

My heart leaped – Kemba was alive and whole! – and then I turned angrily on the Time Lord. "What's going on?"

"Sorry for the deception, Dyoni," he said, not looking sorry at all. He scooped up his rifle, and threw me mine. "It's time to mine the room. I'll explain as we work."

What choice did I have? I gave the orders, and my squad began to work, setting the explosives from our packs and their timers. "Explain," I growled. "Why didn't you alert me to what was going to happen?"

"Because our friend the Movellan was monitoring every conversation you and I had," the Time Lord said. "I *couldn't* tell you. So I enlisted Kemba's help instead. I had him pretend to be injured in the attack, and then stayed behind to let him into the complex behind us before locking the doors. He trailed us down here and waited for my signal."

"So you didn't really trust the robot?"

"I *wanted* to," he admitted. "Truly, I'm a very trusting person at hearts. Or at least I used to be. But I simply couldn't afford to take the chance. And we did know that there was a Movellan fleet hanging about somewhere in interstitial space, but we just didn't know where. We needed him to signal the fleet, so that we could tap into the signal and trace it. If he was being honest and upfront with us, we could have simply destroyed the War Computer as planned. But he lied to us and tried to use us. We have no choice."

"The Time Lords will destroy the fleet?"

"Yes." He shrugged again. "We can't allow them to invade some innocent planet – it would distract from the war effort. And we obviously can't trust them to behave themselves. What other choice do we have?" He stared off into some unfathomable distance. "That's the problem with war – it leads you to do things you would much rather not do."

"All ready," Chara reported.

I nodded. "Set the timers, and let's get out of here. I'm sick of this damned planet."

We hurried down the escape tunnel. As the robot had promised, it brought us out far from the bunker. I looked back – there were three saucers hovering above it now, and one on the ground, spewing out Daleks. They and the Ogrons moved into the depression.

"About now…" the Time Lord murmured.

And the pit exploded. The hovering saucers were caught in the up-blast, and spun out of control, crashing into the ruined city. Fire and debris rained down into the huge hollow in the ground. Nothing could have survived that inferno.

"Another glorious day in paradise," the Time Lord muttered to himself. "Betrayal, murder and death."

"And heroism," I added. "Don't forget that part. My squad was wonderful – even in the bits I didn't know about. And we all survived more or less intact."

"Be thankful for small mercies, eh?" He gave another of those tired smiles. "You're a lot like your grandmother – and I say that with all due admiration. Despite everything, you persist in your optimism."

“What about you?” I asked him, with some sympathy.

“Oh, optimism was one of the first things I lost, and perhaps the one that I regret the most. Now…”

“Yes?”

“Now we have a job to do. We’d better get back to the ship before more saucers start arriving – Chara’s got some pretty fancy flying to do, you know.”

He barely spoke afterwards, and when we eventually arrived back at HQ he simply wandered off – no goodbye, no look back over his shoulder. It was as if he had already forgotten us, and perhaps he had. But I doubt I will ever forget him.

III. Sonnet

by Jenny Colgan

The audience regards the empty stage
As slowly silence falls for the newcomer
The Doctor enters, calm yet full of rage
Follows the path, again, of new endeavour
His comrade Shakespeare knows these tales of yore
And sparkles every word with golden hue
The Doctor reaches to his very core
And tells of stories old, and makes them new
Romèo!, Henry! Lear! The men he bore
And Shakespeare thinks: each single man is you.
For every tale that Shakespeare gladly gived
The Doctor played; and wished that he had lived

Disjecta Membra

by Elton Townend-Jones

"He's there," she breathed, staring into the wardrobe mirror.

A shiver ran down her spine, but all I could see were her and me, standing by the hotel bed. Together, alone.

She gasped in terror. "He's seen us! He's coming towards us."

The man in the mirror was coming to get us.

It was Sunday morning, the first sunny day in weeks, and Cass went for a run while I cooked myself breakfast. I'd been out the night before and my body was crying out for bacon and eggs.

I was also hoping to listen to *Desert Island Discs*, but the radio wouldn't work. Transmission's never been that great in the flats and I still don't have digital, but you can only spend so much. I edit a small music magazine and Cass is an actor; everything we earn goes into the house – apart from the money we'd put aside for our anniversary, which we'd soon be spending in the Lakes.

I ate in silence, though I could hear the Cathedral bells going for it in the distance. As they reached a crescendo, the sunshine died and the sky went dark, which was a bit creepy. Lightning flashed and it started to hammer it down.

I chuckled at the thought of Cass scurrying home like a drowned rat, but glancing at the clock, I realized she was already late. She never went for more than an hour. It's strange, but whenever she went out for any length of time I'd worry that I'd not see her again; that a car would hit her and that'd be it. I'd wonder how I'd cope. After two hours, I tried her mobile, but that just started ringing in the bedroom.

With a mind full of panic and a belly full of greasy spoon, I jogged up the road through the belting rain, quickly startled by the wailing distress of an ambulance speeding past.

I ran, as best I could, past the Cathedral and down the hill into the park. For over an

hour, I followed the footpath, back and forth, but there was no-one about. Even the ducks, swans and geese had taken shelter – so where was Cass?

I told myself it was silly to panic; because of the rain, we'd missed each other, and if I made my way home, there she'd be, singing in the shower.

I jogged back up the hill, wheezing. The Cathedral loomed above me, misty in the rain. A fire engine and two police cars pulled out of its grounds and silently headed into town.

I refused to listen to my fears.

I called out her name. There was no answer.

In wet and muddy boots, I ran upstairs hoping to be greeted from bedroom or bathroom. She wasn't there.

I was about to call the police, when the front door rattled.

She was back. I'd needlessly panicked and she was back.

I ran downstairs and rushed to the door, but it wasn't her.

It was a policeman.

Cass was only in hospital for a few days.

She remembered kissing me goodbye, switching on her music, jogging to the park, chatting to a small dog, running towards the Cathedral, and then …

Sudden brightness followed by utter dark.

"It was like a billion giant mirrors, dazzling under the sun," she said. "Then everything went black."

The police said the bell-tower had been struck by lightning and the famous rose window had suffered significant damage. Cass had been running past when it happened and was seriously concussed when hit in the face by exploding glass. They found her clawing at the ground, asking for a doctor.

The doctors said it was a miracle her eyes hadn't been damaged, but the tissue around them was infected and she'd have to have them bandaged up for several weeks.

And so it was that I became Cass's eyes. For a month I showered her, dressed her, fed her, read to her, and generally made sure she had everything she needed. When the crushing headaches began, all I could do was prescribe tablets and hope for the best.

When the dressings finally came off, Cass had to adjust to the previously unnoticed dazzle of ordinary daylight, but thanks to curtains, sunglasses and painkillers, she was back

to normal. Or so it seemed.

The day before yesterday, I found her screaming in the bedroom.

I was working from home and looking forward to our trip to the Lakes. Cass had been getting ready for a photo-shoot. She usually did her make-up in a mirror on the bedside table, but as I rushed in, she was pressed against the wall, eyes clamped shut, rigid with fear. There was make-up all over the floor and the mirror had been knocked over.

I held her to me and asked what was wrong. She laughed with relief and pulled herself together.

Whilst she'd been looking in the mirror, she thought she'd seen someone, standing behind her. She'd thought it was me, but quickly realized it wasn't.

I put it down to passing traffic, sending stripes of shadow and light across the walls. She told me she was stupid and I told her she wasn't.

But when she caught the train into London, I felt anxious.

That night, Cass told me the shoot had gone well, but she seemed subdued, saying she was tired and had a headache. She went to bed early – still in her make-up, which she never does – leaving me on the sofa, wondering.

Yesterday, I was awoken by blazing sunlight and Cass singing in the shower. Happy that she was happy, I got that spring feeling. That optimism you get when the sun's out and the sky's at its bluest.

It left me in a single moment.

I pulled open the door to find Cass, cowering and naked in the bath, still shouting my name. I turned the shower off and asked her what the hell was going on.

She pointed at the steamed-up mirror, averting her gaze from it. "Can't you see him?'

Rubbing away the condensation, I saw only myself and, behind me, Cass, shivering and genuinely scared.

She told me there was someone else; a man.

This freaked me out, but there was no one there, just the two of us.

Eyes still closed, she took her towel and I helped her into the spare room, where there are no mirrors. Composing herself, but evidently still frightened, she told me about the man she'd seen; his rusty leather coat, his ragged beard.

"He was talking to me," she said, "but I couldn't hear him.'

Then she told me what had happened in London.

The journey there had been fine, but just before the shoot Cass glimpsed the man in the mirror. She calmed herself and went on with the shoot, constantly aware that even the tiniest reflective surface displayed his whereabouts.

On the way home, Cass was aware of him in the windows of her empty train, reaching over her own reflected shoulders and banging silently on the surface of the glass as if trying to break into her world, mouthing unheard words.

Sick with fear, she'd closed her eyes, holding onto thoughts of getting home.

I held her as she sobbed and asked me what was happening to her. Cass suddenly pulled away and dashed a painting from its hook, smacking it into another wall. It fell, bent and broken, scattering in pieces across the floor.

I was shocked and indignant, but Cass didn't care. She was cowering from several bearded mirror men banging to escape from multiple fragments of picture glass.

"I think he's saying my name," she said.

I drove us to Bowness-on-Windermere, certain that a change of scenery might help. On the way she caught glimpses of the man in several shiny surfaces, but her headache was so painful that she slept most of the way, my sun-hat pulled over her eyes.

We checked into the lakeside hotel and, acting as carefree as possible, we covered the mirrors and unpacked.

I made some tea. This should have been routine, and I'm surprised what happened hadn't happened before. Maybe it was the light, or Cass actually noticing, but as I handed her a mug, she panicked, holding it at arms length as if urging me to take it back.

She could see the man's reflection in her tea.

I took the mug and looked into it. A distorted face peered up from the milky surface. My own. I told her there was nothing to be afraid of.

"He's there," she insisted, taking a brave peek. "Can't you see him? He's reaching over us," she said in gasping panic, "coming closer.'

I gripped her arm with my free hand. "It's okay, I'm here…'

She was bent almost double with fear. "He wants to touch me!'

Five wet fingers burst from the tea mug and a grasping, groping hand reached into the room.

I hurled the mug at the wall where it cracked and broke. Tea ran down the wallpaper and soaked into the carpet.

Now that both of us were going mad, I'm not sure how I convinced her that looking in the wardrobe mirror would be a good idea, but I wanted her help in seeing him. I wanted to make sense of what had just happened.

When she got over the shock of seeing him again, and I got over my disappointment that I couldn't, Cass realised that the mirror man wasn't trying to touch her, he was holding up his hands apologetically.

"Now he's holding his wrist," she said. "Wriggling his fingers. Pulling a sorry face. I think he's apologising about the tea. He's walking away now. Towards the window.'

I looked across the room to the real window. There was no one there.

"He's pointing at the curtains. I think he wants us to open them.'

Checking Cass was okay, I got up and opened the curtains. The sunlight glittering on the lake dazzled me and filled the room.

"He's nodding," said Cass. "Nodding and pointing out of the window.'

"But why?" I asked. "There's nothing out there but …'

The lake. Of course.

I squeezed Cass's hand as we stood on the wooden jetty at Lake Windermere.

I looked down at the scintillating water, but saw only the two of us, rippling.

After a few deep breaths, Cass also looked, and told me that the man was starting to appear, taking on a solid image in the water.

And he was, because I could see him too. I could see him!

The surface of the lake broke up and all three reflections scattered. A large patch of dark water coalesced and coagulated into a solid shape resembling a man. And as quickly as it had formed, it dipped heavily, beneath the surface.

A bleak, brief silence followed, before a straggly brown-haired head burst from the lake, shaking and spitting water in all directions.

"Yes!" it cried.

It belonged to the body of a bobbing man, in a dark leather coat, heavy with water, who groped at the jetty for purchase.

Nervously, I helped him from the lake.

As he checked himself over, making sure he was all there, his somewhat fancy-dress clothes, heavily-layered in dark browns and greens dripped over the wooden walkway.

Cass backed away a touch.

"Please," he said, "don't be afraid. Not of me."

He was about my age, maybe a little older, but with hollow cheeks, an untidy brown goatee flecked with grey, and the saddest eyes I have ever seen.

"Good afternoon," he said grabbing our hands and shaking them firmly. "It worked, thank you."

"What worked?" I asked. "Who are you?'

"I was at the Cathedral," he said, nodding at Cass. "Cassandra remembers." Despite his apparent ordeal, he gave Cass a sad smile. "You were jogging," he said. "I was the chap on the bell tower, fighting for his life. Such as it is.'

"What?" I asked.

He paused, seeming to collect his damp thoughts. "Something ancient and overlooked escaped from the Apparitia of Nameless Forms;something appallingly attractive and dangerously destructive. A beast of light and mirrors. It hid in the Eye of my Ship. I brought it here by accident.'

"Oh my God," said Cass. "I remember. It was like…'

"Yes," said the man, his fingers wiggling, as if to coax the memories from her.

"It was like lightning, dancing in strange shapes," said Cass, eyes wide. "And the bells were ringing; deafening me. You were yelling at me, but I couldn't hear you.'

"That's right," said the man. "I'd thrown everything I could at the … Mirrorlon…'

"Mirrorlon?" I asked.

"Call it what you like," he said. "I was hoping to tame it, use it against the … well, to use it in … in this thing I'm involved in. I should have been better prepared when I freed it.'

"Freed it?" I asked. "I thought you said it escaped?'

"Did I say that?" he asked, sharply, eyes fathomless. He smiled suddenly; a weak, out-of-practice smile. "The beast was hungry. The Earth was toast and humanity the beans. The best I could do at short notice was dissipate it through sonic amplification – hence the ultra-high frequency of the reverberating bells. Seeing Cassandra below, distracted my attention for merely an instant – but long enough for the dying beast to prismatically absorb me. I was trapped in light and mirrors. If an infinitesimal piece of the beast's *disjecta membra* hadn't entered Cass's eye then I'd have been dissipated for ever.'

"What?" asked Cass, understandably shocked.

"It's nothing dangerous," said the man confidently, gulping a great lungful of Cumbrian air as he spoke. "But it was enough for the light in your eyes to project me back onto this reality,'.

"But my eyes weren't damaged …'

"No, but what do you suppose is giving you that dreadful headache?'

Cass's left eye had become a transmitter, he explained, beaming him back – from

what I think he called a dimensional fold – into this reality, but trapping him in reflective surfaces as photogenic matter. Or something. Apparently, he couldn't escape from them, they were too solid; what he needed to help him through was a large body of liquid and some sunshine.

It sounded like nonsense.

"Indubitably," said the man, "but then nothing about such creatures is easily explained by the physics of this universe.'

"*This* universe?" I asked.

"Yes, this universe," he said, turning to Cass. "Thank you. Now, I think one good turn deserves another, don't you?" He produced a small wand-like device from inside his soaking coat. "This will dissipate the Mirrorlon fragment, get rid of the headaches and leave you right as rain. You've got great things to be getting on with, things that count, and all this is just holding you up." He raised the wand to Cass's eye, its tip glowed red.

"Are you sure it'll work?" asked Cass, nervously.

"Trust me," he said. "I'm a …"

His words tailed off for a moment and a lost look filled his little boy eyes.

"I'm a good man.'

And so he was.

Author's note:

Dedicated to the memory of Derek Watson (alias ChaosCity Comics). I only knew him five years but he quickly became my dearest friend. We shared music, gigs, comics, food and movies. He knew little about Doctor Who, but excited about my enthusiasm for it, he asked me to show him all of it from the start to the present day. We only got as far as "Frontier in Space', but we knew he was ill even then. That was Christmas 2014 and he'd been having treatment since February. Less than three weeks later he was gone. He was only 51. This is for you, D – you'd have loved this book. I'll always miss you.

Derek Watson (1963 – 2015)

IV. Loop

Cinder.

Cinders.

Cinders...

They rain down, fragile moths, like flakes of dry skin from a greystone golem. Embers. Cinders and embers. Burnt time.

It's a tobacco brown morning in the belly of autumn, the fallen leaves cornflaked in the gutters of the cobblestone streets of a Paris under siege ...

It's a bright summer's day, everything illuminated in violent yellow and orange, sunspots and glimmer, the scorch of the sun breaking fiercely through the death rattle Ozone Layer, driving the last survivors of the Earth Empire Homeworld into their shelters ...

Winter, as cold as ice, blue lips and cracked nostrils, numb fingers wrapped around frozen triggers on Space-Age weapons, the Ghast Pipers wailing through the snow, screaming up the defences of New Tehran ...

It's calm and cool and the trees are budding, the girls in light dresses step tentatively outdoors. The nights lasting longer, a smell of jasmine in the air as a small English town, in the year rationing ends, breathes and blooms and begins anew after the man in the bow tie has gone ...

Full temporal simultaneity. All time happening at once. All time, all seasons, all days. On a patch of warped vortex, a crumbling outcrop overlooking the sluggish, polluted flow of the timestream, a blue box stands, caked in ash and burning fragments of canonicity. In its open doorway, a man looks out at it all in sheer, incredulous horror.

In the past he used to come here - to this little protected bubble of improbability hidden within the multitudinous fleshy folds of the vortex, and watch with pleasure the ebb and flow of time, history, future and possibility with its myriad tributaries.

Look at it now.

Canonical, quasi-synchronous chronicity spinning out from the green and blue planet, lighting up the vortex like a Roman Candle. *Why is it always Earth?*

Earth. Terra. Telluria. Sol Three. The planet where, for one reason or another, the Timelines of the universe converged and which this dark-eyed elfin faced, young-old Gallifreyan with a long, ruined, ill fitting jacket, bandolier and a dark beard flecked with white, finds himself thinking of once again.

That protection, bought at a high price from the Chronosmiths, is crumbling. Splinters from the War embedded in the skin of the pocket dimension, one second out of sync with the rest of the universe, bringing the Earth and all her possible timelines and realities, little by little, back into sync.

Back into sync with hell.

It had to happen sometime.

The Gallifreyan is startled. Behind him, a wheezing-groaning sound. Another TARDIS? Another Time Lord? It would be a first for in all the times he's visited this place over his long, long life he has never seen another soul. He turns around and sees a blue box fade into view. A 1950s Earth Police Box. For a moment his hearts leap - the possibility of a future? (He is certain this is not a ghost from the past). It means ... it means all is not lost. It means he lives to survive this horror and that therefore, this horror can be stopped. A future incarnation, perhaps (is that *hope?*) even a man calling himself The Doctor ...

The doors of this second TARDIS open. An older man, with a craggy, careworn face and wearing a battered leather coat and a herringbone patterned scarf.

Not a new man. Just the same one but older. Much older.

"Still wearing the Doctor's coat, I see," the older man says.

"I like to think of it as a tribute," the younger replies. "A reminder."

The older man smiles ruefully.

"It's good to keep being reminded." he says. "I'd forgotten I used to do that. Ought to have kept that coat."

"Swap?"

"And a sense of humour too," the old man says. "Another thing lost."

The two men, the same man twice, stand and look at each other for a moment.

"How long?" the younger man says finally.

"Quite long. You can tell that by looking at me. Though, with a war on, appearances can be deceptive. Maybe not quite as long as you imagine."

"But we're still fighting in the War, I take it?"

The old man looks away, his startling green-brown eyes peering over his younger self's shoulder into the swirling vortex. "We are indeed." he says, quietly. Then, raising his hand, points up at the sky "Would you look at that ..."

The younger man turns to see a flash of orange and red tearing across the vortex, a

violent crack of sharp temporal lightning.

"That. You see it?" the old man continues. "The quantum fissure that obviates Mondas from the timestream."

"Not just Mondas. Telos too," the young man says. "No more Cybermen. They will have never existed."

"You say that with some satisfaction."

"A little perhaps."

"The Time Lords have just unleashed their first weapon from the Omega Arsenal; used it against the Pan-Kaled Phalange in the Exillon system. A fleet of Cyber ships got in the way. Now they've all been wiped from existence. Part of *our* history removed. All those people, all those planets ..."

"All those Daleks," the younger interrupts. "I know. I gave them the idea."

"Though you never expected that, did you? Never expected they'd use a weapon from the Arsenal?"

The younger man turns back to face his older self. "No. I didn't. What happens next?"

The old man strokes his white beard, weighing up the question and the implications of answering it.

"The weapon was not quite as effective as the Time lords hoped. The Mondasians have time-travel too, and although our weapon partially erases them from existence, it also succeeds in setting the cyber-seed free to float in infinity on the dimensional winds ..."

"No. I mean, what happens next with the Daleks?"

The old man stares at his younger self. Sees the anger, the pain, the hatred. But he also sees the innocence - an innocence soon to be lost forever.

"They retaliate of course," he says quietly. "In ways more inventive, more deadly and more unimaginable than before. Events unwritten are rewritten then unwritten again. History is changed, future is altered. Every moment changing all the time. The War is about to enter a new phase. You're going to be busy."

"I would maintain," the younger man says "that there never is a 'new phase', as you call it. It is all relative. It's already happening. It's always already happened. The nature of a Time War."

"For you personally I meant"

"Ah. In that case, I had better get going. And you?

"No. The War is over for me."

"I see." A pause … then: "I take it we don't intend to survive this?"

"I cannot see how we possibly can."

Silence. Canon, continuity, chronology swirl and whirl and scream through the vortex, but here, on this patch, there is only silence.

"Karn ..." the younger man says wistfully "You know, I never expected that to be the place where the Doctor finally died. It seems ... "

"Unworthy, somehow?"

"Sad. A sad end."

"He couldn't have fought in this War. You know that. Not in that body. Not with those values."

"I have fought in many others before."

"*The Doctor* has," corrects the older. "We are not worthy to call ourselves by that name, even if others persist in doing so. In any case, as you said, the Doctor died on Karn, did he not?"

"*He* did. Along with many others."

"And all I've experienced. All I've seen. And all *you* have done and seen thus far. The Doctor could not have done that. He would rather be dead."

"Yes. I think so."

"So why do you still wear his coat?"

"I told you. A tribute. A reminder"

"Of the Doctor?"

The younger man turns out the inner lining of the coat. He points to a stitched label on the inside pocket. The older man comes closer and reads it.

"Schweitzer and Davison, Master Tailors. Cork Street, London," the old man smiles. "I remember. 1803, wasn't it?"

"The Ghoul of Whitechapel," the younger man replies. "Yes. 1803. A human naturalist experimenting in teleportation. Incredible fellow. Well intentioned but his machine was unstable, caused apparitions".

The older man laughs. Something he hasn't done in a long, long time.

"Scared the wits out of half of London, if I recall" he says. "Human ingenuity! A prototype transmat over two-hundred years before their invention. All from a ramshackle workshop above an East End pub. Extraordinary."

"Which I why I continue to wear the coat," the younger man says.

"To remind you of *Earth*." the older man nods, remembering.

They stare at each other. The same pair of eyes, separated by who knows how many

years, decades, centuries, meeting.

"Why are you here?" the younger says finally.

"For that very reason, for Earth."

And the younger man understands.

"So," he says. "It's time to say farewell to this place. This sanctuary."

"Indeed. I've managed to come into the possession of a piece of technology. I cannot of course, tell you the details of how I did so. You will have to experience that for yourself. In any case, this ... device will enable me to fold the Earth, her timelines, her possible pasts and probable futures, all of what humanity has achieved and will accomplish, the great human expansions, into this place. Hidden within this fold in the vortex."

"But not foolproof."

"No." the older man concurs. "Not even close. But enough to ensure some degree of protection from the worst ravages of the Time War."

"But surely," the younger man says, "by crossing into your own timestream like this, you're risking great consequences. You've told your younger self – me – of your plans. Should the Daleks or the Time Lords discover what you have done, extract the information from me ..."

"No one will know what I have done," the older man says, his voice suddenly cold and hard. "Which is why *you* have to leave. You must go. The Earth may be bastioned, but it still needs its protector. There will be many attempts to break through. Some will succeed, some will fail. And, as you said, all this has *already* happened. From my point of view. I'm just doing what I've already done. Such is the nature of this War."

"I see," the younger man says. "And, if I may ask, what is next for you? After this? You said that your War is over."

The old man sighs.

"I have come to a decision. That is all you need to know."

"Interference," the younger man says. "Meddling. Changing history. Changing my own timestream. If it has come to that..."

"It has. And you will learn from it. Now ... go."

The younger man walks slowly back to his TARDIS. The older man calls after him.

"Would you leave me your jacket?"

The younger man turns."You mean the *Doctor's* jacket of course."

"Yes. Of course. Just to remind me."

The younger man takes off his jacket and throws it to himself.

"Thank you." the older man says. "You'll find a suitable replacement in the TARDIS.

If you are so inclined."

The younger man nods and opens the door of the Police Box. In the doorway, he turns to look at his future. He sees the old man already busy, hunkered down, one knee resting on the Doctor's coat, a collection of unfamiliar instruments laid out in front of him.

Saving the earth, the younger man thinks as he steps inside and closes the door.

The old man hears the TARDIS de-materialise and remembers; remembers this moment and how his younger self felt having seen a glimpse of his own future. The dismay. The pain. The engulfing saddness.

"Oh well," he says. "There's a War on. He'll get over it."

A lie, of course.

The Holdover

by Daniel Wealands

Vanus had been assigned as an escort for the incoming transport ship. It was a hateful job, but doing it granted you an extra food ration for the week so there was always high demand. As he stood in the freezing winds, his ragged cloak billowing behind him, he relished the warmth of the shuttle's thrusters as it eased itself onto the icy landing pad, melting the frost and spraying his face with the warm mist.

Once the doors had opened he could see the mass of new arrivals, crammed like sardines in the transporter compartment, shuffling towards the opening. He hated having to see the looks of hope as the families and broken soldiers stepped from the cramped containers, blinking into the blinding white of the snowy landscape, only to see that hope evaporate in the cold light of reality as it dawned on them that they had been lied to.

The Holdover, they had been told, was a safe haven from the Time War. A place where those whose homes and cities had been destroyed, the displaced, those who couldn't or wouldn't fight or refused to become any part of the War could, by the grace of the High Council and the Generals, carry on with their lives without fear of repercussion. The Time Lords were not Daleks, after all. They had been led to believe that this was to be a home away from home, where they would not feel the breath of the war on their necks. What they got instead was the frozen deserts of Treytis, a tiny moon in a backwater spiral of the Ashara nebula. Out of sight and out of mind, far away from the war.

Vanus watched the expressions of the new arrivals as they took in their new surroundings. He saw the hope drain from the gaunt faces that had experienced too much misery already. From the midst of this mass strode a man who didn't fit. He walked with purpose, gazing at the barren white tundra with a look in his grey eyes that spoke of defiance more than submission. He was dressed differently too, wearing an aged and battered leather jacket which covered an equally ancient waistcoat, some sort of bandolier and a tattered herringbone scarf. As he surveyed his new surroundings he stroked his short greying beard as if heavy in thought.

"Welcome to the Holdover," said Vanus, making directly for the curious man. "Name's Vanus, I'm here to escort you to your quarters and help you settle into your new ..." he paused as he saw the man raise his eyebrows in what felt like judgement of his prepared speech.

“Home?” said the stranger with more than a little sarcasm, his voice all gravel and honey. “I very much doubt that anyone has ever felt the urge to call this place a ‘home’ don’t you?”.

He dropped a large kit bag to the floor and stretched, rubbing the aches from his arms, all the while never taking his steely eyes from Vanus, as though making a full appraisal of the man

“Well?” he said sharply, “Are you going to show me to my wondrous new *home* any time soon, or would it be easier for you if I just expired right here in the snow?”.

Vanus looked from the stranger to the bag and back again, his mouth lolling open at the sheer gall of this newcomer. He spoke in rich, educated tones that belied some sort of privileged background, yet had the appearance of a Shabogan derelict.

“May I ask who you are sir, that you feel you can address me in such a manner?” Vanus raised himself to his full height, which wasn’t much more than that of the stranger, but still made him feel a little more assertive in the situation. “Do you possess some high title or rank that makes you more than I?”

The man’s gaze didn’t even falter, but Vanus could see there was something hidden in the depths of those eyes, something stirring like a foggy memory.

“I bear no title,” he replied, “not anymore. However, given the circumstances I find myself in and the fact that this place resembles some sort of work site, you may call me ... the Foreman.”

An odd smile broke across the man’s face as he bent down and grabbed his bag from the snow again. “Let’s be off shall we? To somewhere a little warmer and you can finish your silly little welcoming speech along the way, yes?” The Foreman headed off towards the Habitation Complex as though he had known the way, leaving a bewildered Vanus to catch up, mouth still hanging agape.

Mid stride however, the new arrival turned to see Vanus rushing along behind him.

“Get a move on would you Vanus? I can smell stew over there.”

The Habitation Complex was a compound of colourless, utilitarian large and long metal huts, arranged in rows of twelve by twelve, covering at least one square kilometre. Vanus and the Foreman were seated at the end of a long trestle table in the large, stark hall that was known as ‘Welcome Centre’. There were no decorations to speak of, just flat gray walls and rows of identical tables. Along one wall was a serving counter, two droids dressed in kitchen whites, were serving the stew to the seemingly unending stream of pathetic and weary refugees; men, women and children. Gallifreyans of all types and stripes that flowed, into the structure from a guarded entrance that led back out to the central courtyard.

Vanus watched as the Foreman swirled his spoon though a thick bowl of meaty

broth without actually eating it. This had been going on for the past twenty minutes as the man quizzed his guide on the details of the Holdover.

"So everything the Council have been telling people is a lie, is that it?" he enquired, gently blowing on a spoonful of stew, testing it to his lips and promptly depositing it back to the bowl with a grimace. "Is this not the safe haven they were promised?"

"No, no, no. I told you," said Vanus impatiently, "the Holdover is just that … a staging point, a transition. A queue if you will. Refugees are catalogued and recorded before being designated a number and a place in the system. From here they will, eventually, be taken on to Kayeff. *That* is the safe haven." Vanus had already explained this to the Foreman a dozen times, on each occasion adding more detail to the last. He felt as though he was wasting his breath. Was the man even listening?

"A processing centre then." he said finally. "Though, even for refugees these are appalling standards. More like an internment camp than any sort of halfway house."

Vanus flinched involuntary. In his months of being here in the Holdover, he had heard that expression over and again from different sources. 'Internment camp'. It put him in mind of the primitive planets he'd learnt about. It put him in mind of the Daleks.

"Anyway," the Foreman continued, "Why not just ship everyone directly to this Kayeff' place? Fourteen relative days in that crowded transport ship and we're still not at our destination. I know TARDISes and long-range transmats aren't allowed to travel here for fear of alerting Dalek sensors, but surely it cannot be that difficult to bring us there without this unnecessary pit-stop. Processing indeed." he murmured, looking into the bowl and abstractly stirring his rapidly cooling stew.

Vanus was about to reply, but the Foreman wasn't finished.

"And, more to the point, Vanus: Kayeff. Where is *that*? I thought I knew this system quite well, especially Treytis. Discovered by the early pioneers of Gallifrey and home, once upon a time, to the training academy of The Perpetual Watch. Which is why they chose it! No other populated or habitable planets in the system. So the location of Kayeff is a mystery to me."

"Look, I don't have all the answers, I'm just a refugee here too remember. I only signed up for greeting duties for the extra rations."

"Rations you say?" the Foreman chuckled. "Hardly sounds like the kind of thing I would expect from even a poorly run holding facility. And just how long have you been here, Vanus?"

"Relatively speaking, about five months." Vanus replied.

"Five months, you say? For processing! And no word of transfer to the illustrious and mysterious Kayeff? Just how long is the queue anyway?"

Vanus looked down at the table, his thin yellowish fingers spread out on its coarse wooden surface. That way the Foreman wouldn't notice them tremble.

"I … ," he began, his voice low and thin, "I am still being processed. I have been told that I must be patient, wait my turn. There are others who arrived the same time as me who have already gone on to Kayeff and many thousands since. My ... sort, are very low down the queue."

"Your sort?" the Foreman asked quietly. His voice was softer, less interrogatory. "What, pray, *is* your 'sort'?"

"I was … ." he started, then caught himself. "I *am* a conscientious objector."

"I see." said the Foreman. He looked away from Vanus for a moment, his brow furrowed and eyes flicking as if he was having an argument within, some inner conflict or debate he was having difficulty resolving with himself. Finally he said, "That marks you down. In their estimation, I mean?"

"Even deserters are processed quicker," Vanus replied. "They go on to Kayeff almost as soon as they arrive at the Holdover."

The Foreman was not even looking at him now, noted Vanus with dismay. He knew why. He had experienced that reaction many times since coming here. But then he followed the Foreman's gaze and saw his eyes were scanning the room.

On the opposite wall was a large double door guarded by a stony faced trooper in an official, ornate yet decidedly military looking uniform of deep crimson with black trim. Carrying a pulse rifle with a silver-broadsword bayonet attached, the Foreman's gaze lingered on him longer than any other feature of the room.

"This place certainly is not what it purports to be. It's surely no 'staging post' or transit camp. And I have seen better conditions in some prison colonies," he added with a hint of venom, still eyeing the guards. "Not to mention far stronger security. Curious."

Unsure at what the Foreman was getting at, Vanus felt obliged to enlighten him, "The security here is purposely quite minimal given the circumstances," he said, returning to the register of his 'welcoming' spiel.

"Yes" said the Foreman, abstractly stroking his beard "Yet the guards are, in fact, members of the aforementioned Perpetual Watch. The private soldiers of the President. So secret, they hardly exist. An order of highly trained, highly skilled and disciplined agents of the High Council. Even the Celestial Intervention Agency has no control over them. And here they are guarding refugees in the galaxy's toilet rather than defending the capital from imminent destruction." Rising from his chair he added, "And I'm going to find out why."

The troops immediately raised their weapons as the man in the battered leather coat approached them.

"Oh put those down, you'll do someone an injury" said the Foreman with a sigh of impatience. "Who is in charge here?"

"That is classified information," the guard said, "I suggest you back away before I am forced to - "

“To what, exactly?” snarled the Foreman cutting the guard off, a fearsome look descending over his face. “You are a Novice of The Perpetual Watch. Trained to protect the President and the High Council, keep the secrets of the Cruciform and a bunch of ceremonial nonsense designed to make you feel important. Why, I doubt you have even undergone live field training with this!”

Without warning he snatched the pulse rifle from the shocked guard’s hands and began to strip and dismantle it in front of him. Vanus ran up to him.

“What are you doing?” he hissed at the Foreman and then turned to the guard “I’m sorry. This one’s a new arrival and orientation protocols haven’t yet fully been.” But the guard wasn’t listening. He was staring, eyes wide, gawking at this strange man who was taking the weapon apart, deftly knowing exactly which pins to pull and catches to release, all the while keeping his eyes firmly upon him.

“I asked you who was in charge of this shambles of an operation,” said the Foreman, his tone authoritative “and as former Wartime Prime of the Order I have automatic yellow level clearance and outrank you!” He let the disassembled pieces of the gun cascade to the hard floor. “So, unless you want to find yourself as one of the security crew in a Type 27 TARDIS, sloppily retrofitted for battle on the Spiridon front, I suggest you answer my question.”

The guard’s eyes flicked uncertainly from Vanus to the Foreman to the remains of the gun on the floor. His training, however, was so ingrained he knew better to trust merely the words of a civilian (even despite this mans knowledge of the terrifying Spiridon Front and accurate description of the makeshift and useless Battle TARDISes which were every soldiers fear) and, in any case, this man could well be a deserter. The guard was about to ask for proof, but the Foreman anticipated him.

“If it is my credentials you are looking for,” the Foreman said quietly, “Then, very well: ι τυρνεδ αρουνδ ανδ τηεψ ωερε αλλ ωεαρινγ εψεπατξηεσ”

The guard visibly blanched. “The tocsin of the Perpetual Watch!” he gasped.

“Yes,” the Foreman replied, grimly. “So, will you please enlighten me as to who is in charge here?”

The guard, still reeling from the words the Foreman had spoken, hesitated just that little bit too long.

“NOW!” bellowed the Foreman, his voice full of fire and anger, reverberating around the large long room, attracting the attention of everyone within, even that of the droids who stopped serving long enough to see what was causing a disturbance to their lunch queue.

“Do I need to repeat myself?” the Foreman asked, in a low, gritty sigh.

Vanus watched in awe as the guard hurriedly saluted and began to escort the stranger through the doors that, Vanus knew, led to the underground corridor that connected the Welcome Centre to ‘The Mansion House’ and Holdover Central Command.

Just before the doors closed behind them, a head popped back through the gap.

"Coming Vanus?" asked the Foreman. "Unless you have any conscientious objection ..."

"Just who the hell are you?" Vanus asked in his most forceful whisper, as the pair followed the guard though the corridor beyond the doors. "You told me your name was the Foreman. Now you're claiming to be a...a Prime of The Perpetual Watch?"

"I believe I told you that you may *call me* the Foreman" he replied "But what's in a name, anyway? I've been called many things by many people." he replied, swatting away the question "Does it really matter?"

"Well they seem to think it matters, you said you were... *former* Wartime Prime!" Vanus was going purple from frustration now, "I demand to know who you are and what you have got me into!"

"My dear Vanus. We are at the heart of an instillation which may or may not be operated by the Perpetual Watch. We are being escorted to, what I assume will be, the control centre. If I am right we will be met there by whoever it is that has set up, run and orchestrated every aspect of this place. Which isn't, I have strong grounds to suspect, a staging post for refugees and undesirables – no offence – but something else entirely."

"But what?" asked Vanus, his tone plaintive. "What could it be if not a Holdover? Where do all the people go if not to Kayeff?"

"I rather fear" replied the Foreman, tugging again at his beard and straightening his scarf "that we are about to find out."

They approached a set of gunmetal grey doors, embossed with the Seal Of Rassilon and encircled with words in old High Gallifreyan. Vanus was unable to decipher the meaning of the text and yet its words seemed oddly familiar.

The doors slid open.

"Well" crooned a deep voice from the far side of the darkened room, "of all the people I expected to find on this barren cinder, you, Doctor, were certainly last on my list."

From the shadows emerged a statuesque man, enveloped in a long crimson and black tunic adorned with sigils of old High Gallifreyan. As he approached, a shark like grin spread across his face, which was drawn and gaunt and scarred from some battle long since past.

"Doctor!" stammered Vanus, turning to his companion. "You're the Doctor? I mean THE Doctor?"

"I gave up that name a long time ago, Goren" the Doctor replied, his eyes quickly

meeting Vanus'. "You of all people should be aware of that."

"Oh, but of course," came the positively gleeful response as Goren moved towards them from the shadows. "I remember the day the Doctor returned, renouncing his name, appearing before the High Council and taking charge of the Perpetual Watch. Taking the Wartime Primeship right from under my nose. Aided and abetted by his dear Romana, the woman who, for years, had begged him to come back, to intervene, to help us against the Daleks to no avail. Yet all the while, she ran the war like a parlour game. Remember when the Generals took control, Doctor? When Romana screamed and begged for her friend, her mentor … begged him to come back? But of course you don't, dear Doctor. You weren't there."

Vanus looked at the man who, up until now, he'd thought of as some interesting diversion; a curious and questioning new arrival, perhaps a displaced noble or a cosmic hobo but who was, in fact, one of the most mysterious and influential Time Lords since the days of Rassilon.

"... the day the Doctor fled the battlefield at Keria and left his entire flotilla to their fate at the hands of the Pan-Kaled Phalange," Goren continued. "Have you had the opportunity to view the reminders you gave me?" He peeled back his tunic to reveal the full extent of his prostheses.

On inspection Vanus could see the man beneath the cloak was barely a man at all, his left arm and right leg were both robotic, a vast network of interlaced wires and cables spread across his upper chest and fed into a silver box filled into his lower abdomen.

"The Council had ordered a full retreat!" the Doctor pleaded "They were about to use another weapon from the Omega Arsenal. I had no choice but to obey. And if you had done the same then millions would have survived. Instead, Goren, you stormed on like a fool!"

"I was operating under a very different directive to you Doctor," spat the General. "My orders came from an authority higher than the council and their puppet president."

"And I suppose it was the Black Order who provided you with these spare parts? What did that cost you, The Order never do anything for free."

Vanus had heard of the Black Order, of course. But, like the Toclafane of his childhood, they were little more than a myth. In recent times they served as a sort of handy bogeyman batted around by the conspiracy theorists and blamed for anything that went bad; a covert branch of the government (secret even to the C.I.A) that officially didn't exist, but whose authority was indisputable. To be faced by what seemed proof of their existence was, to Vanus, alongside the presence of the Perpetual Watch, yet another layer of singularity in what was shaping up to be a rather singular day.

Goren raised his robotic arm, which hissed as the hydraulics coiled the synthetic muscles and gears whirred as the fist clenched.

"These are a work in progress Doctor, and I have you to thank for them." There was a whistle of escaping pressure as Goren snapped an extended finger towards the Doctor.

“Had it not been for you abandoning me I would never have been trapped in the Silver Devastation anomaly-loop that my TARDIS was forced into.”

Goren moved across the room, his replacement foot producing a cold clanging sound as it struck the concrete, reminding the Doctor of the Cloister Bell aboard the TARDIS, with its sound signaling some imminent danger. “For over fifty relative years I was trapped there, as the Cyber fleets phased in and out of existence, doomed to relive my death and regeneration over and over.” He smiled and rested the mechanical appendage on Vanus’ shoulder, a shark like smile playing in the shadows of his face. “It cost me all my military training and remaining regenerations to get out of there” he cooed, slowly tightening his grip on Vanus’ shoulder “but I must admit the benefits have been quite rewarding!”

Vanus screamed as the steel hand dug deeper into the flesh of his shoulder, he could feel his shoulder blade beginning to buckle from the pressure.

“You see Doctor, I eventually managed to manoeuvre my TARDIS onto a Cyber Tomb Ship that phased back into existence for just the briefest of nanoseconds. It was, after decades, the opportunity I had been waiting for. I stabilised the temporal quickening and slaved the Tomb Ship to my TARDIS.”

The Doctor, watching Goren’s hand squash Vanus’ shoulder, spoke carefully.

“Ingenious, Goren.” he said, eyes flicking from the Generals hand, to Vanus’ agonised expression.

“I learned from the master.” said Goren, and the Doctor flinched involuntarily. “With no more regenerations left and my body dying, I was vulnerable. I used the Cyber technology to keep me alive, replacing my vital organs with cybernetic implants. A temporary fix. But enough to enable me to send out the distress call. But to no avail. No one answered. I tried again and again. The High Council, the War Council, even the C.I.A. I tried everyone.”

“You didn’t call me.” the Doctor said.

“You were nowhere to be found, Doctor,” Goren laughed bitterly. “In any case, my call was eventually heard.”

“The Black Order.” the Doctor said, his voice low.

“They came in their Bowships, their Quantum Schooners. They sailed into the very heart of the Silver Devastation and rescued me. They modified the Cybermen technology to save my body, offering me a tailored, partial conversion. They came to help *one of their own*, Doctor, which is more than you ever did. They made *me* Prime of The Watch, seeing as you had vacated the post. It was just and right.”

“You’re no better than those fools from Mondas!” exclaimed the Doctor, “Using this technology will rob you of your emotions and make you little more than a tool for the Order to manipulate into doing whatever they desire. *You’re* the puppet, Goren. Don’t you see?”

Goren began to laugh, his mirth causing Vanus to shriek ever louder from the pain

in his shoulder. Blood was now trickling down his ragged tunic, leaving a dark stain on his chest.

"My dear Doctor, you are mistaken," Goren replied, his hand splintering Vanus' shoulder. Vanus' legs buckled, yet Goren kept him upright, his metal fingers a skin piercing clamp. "The Order chose me because I shared their ideals, their plan. And, in any case, those fifty years of hell within the anomaly and all my pain and efforts had already removed any emotion that was left within me. This is why I am Prime and why I am here."

The creases in the Doctor's face bunched together as his features twisted into a grimace of shock and disgust.

"My God, man! What is this place? A testing centre for the experiments of the Black Order? Have they learnt nothing from the horrors we have already created in this war?" the Doctor snapped, never once taking his eyes from the pained Vanus.

Goren laughed again, more heartily than before, the sound drowned out by the heightened screams from the pinned prisoner.

"You truly believe the Order are that short sighted? Or that I would be so without intellect that I would simply pour out our plans to you, you... *traitor*? The work being done here is for a far greater purpose." He raised Vanus off the ground as though he were moving a chess piece, turning him in his grip this way and that. "You came here, Doctor, presumably to investigate what indeed was going on. And you couldn't have come at a better time. Alas, however, you will not live to find out."

The Doctor sighed. "You know, Goren, that I can and will stop you."

"You and your 'assistant' will be kept in isolation until I have the authority from the Order to execute you, Doctor," Goren continued as if the Doctor had not spoken, "and there really is no point in attempting to contact your precious puppet High Council. The Order is already moving to ensure the Council cannot be reached."

As he spoke, Goren casually threw Vanus' limp and grey body across the room. It slammed against an ornate pillar by the door and crumpled to the floor.

"What have you done, Goren?" the Doctor growled.

"He will live," replied the General. "For now."

"That is not what I meant," said the Doctor. "What are you and the Order doing here? What is happening on Gallifrey?"

"As we speak, soldiers of the Perpetual Watch are moving into position around the Capitol. Agents of the Order within the Council are standing ready."

"To what end?!" the Doctor snapped, his voice echoing around the room."To weaken Gallifrey? To let in an invasion? What Goren? I demand you tell me."

A blast of energy burst from Goren's finger and slammed into the chest of the shattered body of Vanus, as it lay curled up on the floor. His body convulsed.

"I suggest you tend your patient, Doctor." said Goren quietly.

As Vanus struggled to remain conscious despite the pain and the sickening shock of the energy blast, he was able to open his eyes. He saw the man he had called the Foreman approach, his face no longer hard and impenetrable, but now softened and full of care and remorse.

"I'm sorry my boy. I'm so sorry." was the last thing Vanus heard before slipping into unconsciousness.

There was a light, bright and stinging. It was all he could see for a moment. As his vision adjusted he could see a shape, large and dark moving across his vision from left to right and back again, over and over. Then a noise, like the muffed sounds you hear when your head is submerged. The shape became more defined and, as his wits came back to him, he realised it was the Doctor pacing across, what he now saw was an over-lit and cramped cell barely five metres square. The Time Lord's battered coat was on the floor by the steel door and he was talking to himself.

"Damned fool! What were you expecting him to do, eh? Just hand over the information? Almost got yet another lad killed! And for what?" he said, shaking the silver pen-like device in his hand then holding it up to his ear as though expecting it to answer him somehow. "Now I can't even get this damned screwdriver to loosen the door ... Wood, why did it *have to be* wood?"

"Would this do instead, Doctor?" came a shaky voice from behind him. The Doctor turned to see a deathly pale Vanus sitting up on the stiff cot bed, holding out a crude home-made knife.

"You need to rest, Vanus." he replied, kneeling down by the cot. "You lost a lot of blood back there. We should be thankful they took you to the infirmary first or you would likely be dead now."

Vanus was about to reply, but then his companion's face momentarily hardened,"And don't call me that. It's not my name, not any more."

"I think I'll soon be dead anyway." wheezed Vanus.

"No." the Doctor said, matter of factly. "I need you alive, Vanus. You may just be able to help me. I assume you know your way round the facility?"

Vanus nodded.

"On our way here, we came past a mono-rail terminal and into an adjacent hanger," the Doctor continued, checking the dressing on Vanus' shoulder. "Do you know where we are?"

"The mono-rail is the link to Kayeff," grimaced Vanus as the Doctor probed further into the wound. "The hanger is the terminal building where they carry out maintenance."

“Hmm” the Doctor said, attempting to hide a look of despair as he checked the wound. “I’m afraid the infirmary here is as bad as the kitchen, this wound is infected, even if we could find you some antibiotics and an anti inflammatory within the hour I doubt ...” He trailed off, not daring to look the young refugee in the face. “I’m sorry.”

“Now I see why you stopped calling yourself Doctor,” retorted Vanus. “Your bedside manner is atrocious.” He reached out and pressed the blade into his palm.

“Use it.”

“I cannot do that, Vanus. I will not take a life that I don’t need to.” he replied, pushing the blade away. “We must still hold onto hope.”

“Not for me, you fool!” snapped Vanus, “For the vent in the ceiling!”

He pointed to the corner of the room where an air duct was covered with a heavy mesh and screwed into place. “This is a supply closet, not a cell. Head through that pipe and you should come out at the maintenance bay.”

“You’re in no state to go clambering though ceiling shafts!” chided the Doctor.

“We both know that I’m talking about you.” sputtered Vanus weakly. “At least you can get word out that this isn’t the safe-haven we were promised. Once you’re out I can just about manage to seal the grate back up then toss in the knife. They can torture me all they like. I’m dying anyway. All they can do is speed things up. It should give you enough of a head start” Once more he held the knife out to the Doctor, willing him to do the kind of thing that had once made him so famous; to give hope to the hopeless just one more time.

“I will do all in my power to come back for you, I promise that much.”

He took the knife and quickly removed the panel. The air inside was stale and had hints of motor oil and engine grease to it. He climbed in and sighed. Behind him he heard the grate being replaced and the first screw being tightened. He saw Vanus’ face one last time.

“Well old man, you’ve been in some nasty spots before, but this is up there with the best of them.” he muttered to himself as he began the long crawl to freedom. He thought long and hard about Vanus and how he had been responsible for his inevitable death, dragging the poor boy into the matter. He berated himself for being so foolish. “That was the kind of stupid thing the Doctor would have done.” he said. “This is why I work alone. No room for passengers when there’s a war on.”

“Progress report Lord Goren.” hissed the cold voice over the fragile encrypted audio-link from Gallifrey.

“We are operating at maximum capacity, Magistrate.” Goren replied. “The Doctor turned-up, as we thought he would. But even his inevitable interference can’t stop us now.”

A weary sigh echoed from the audio-link. “Even without that name, he is still a thorn in our sides. Ever the do-gooder.”

“In any case, Magistrate, I am about to depart to the Kayeff to implement the Emergency Sanction. The final batch is in place. They are ready for processing”

“And the excess?” enquired the rasping, distant voice.

“The entire facility will be atomised as soon as we are clear of the gravitational pull. There will be no excess. You have my word.”

At the other end of the audio-link, in an ancient, empty, darkened, cavernous chamber which, until recently, had served as a tomb, Magistrate Maxil, Ombre-Chancillier of the Black Order, smiled, his skull-like face twisted into a hideous visage.

“I await, with pleasure, your next report, Lord Goren.”

In the maintenance bay a wall mounted steel grating, covering a ventilation shaft, was slowly and carefully lowered to the floor and, from the space behind, the man in the battered jacket emerged, mopping his brow with his tattered scarf. He hunkered down behind a stack of crates as a pair of Perpetual Watch guards trooped past.

Beyond the crates waited the monorail cars, sitting in the siding, their doors open and engines running. An engineer, in the red overalls that proclaimed him as a low-level technician, doubtlessly on secondment from the Capitol, was busy at a control panel near the rear of the last cabin in the line.

A sly grin spread across the Doctor’s face as he pawed at an inside pocket, searching for something.

“Always knew this would come in handy again some day.” he muttered, producing a small thin, black, leather booklet, folded like a money clip, about the size of a large business card. “I just hope it works on Gallifreyans...”

He promptly stood up, straightened his coat and tried to look as official as possible. He calmly and assuredly strode from his hiding place over to the engineer, acting to all the world as though he had every right to be there.

“Excuse me my good man” he announced, causing the Engineer to jolt. The Doctor produced the piece of psychic paper and waved it briefly in front of the man’s stunned face.

“Goren has sent me to run an impromptu inspection of the monorail. Is everything in order?”

“No one told me about any inspection!” harrumphed the engineer, a flicker of irritation crossing his features as he read whatever it was he believed he needed to see upon the physic paper. “We had the cars looked at last month, what’s Goren playing at?”

“I’m sorry,” the Doctor sighed, tucking the paper back into his pocket. “I told him it

was a waste of both your time and mine, but you know what he's like, especially when he's in one of those moods." he added in a conspiratorial whisper.

"Don't I know it. What's rattled his cage this time?" sighed the engineer, visibly relaxing at the shared animosity towards their superior.

"Oh, haven't you heard?" the Doctor added nonchalantly, while peering at the workings of the car over the engineer's shoulder. "There is an intruder in the base, it's made him very edgy about security. Is that a bio-dampening inertia coil in there?"

He pointed to a copper coloured spiral in the innards of the control box which was hooked up to a diagnostics tablet in the engineer's hand.

"Damn thing is on the blink again. I keep telling them that the connector is too loose but they never listen. The coil's fractured. Be a week before they can get a replacement out to us." he sighed, rubbing the base of his neck in frustration. "But I've heard that we'll be shipping out before then, so ..."

Reaching into his voluminous jacket the Doctor pulled out the Sonic Screwdriver

"Do you mind if I..." he asked, more out of politeness than actually seeking permission, pointing his device at the coil.

The engineer looked from the device in the Doctor's hand to the burned out coil.

"Be my guest, can't really make it any wor-" The engineer stopped as to his utter amazement the coil began to glow white and hum, as if it was working correctly.

"But... But it was fractured! It needed replacing, how did you..?"

"I simply fused the breach and then reversed the polarities. Simple trick really. Find it works on most things." he replied, putting the device back into the depths of his coat. "Now, how about a lift to the end of the line, hmm?"

The car purred along the line towards an imposing looking structure on the horizon, the landscape around it bleak and desolate. Grey and dusty like a stained desert.

"Where does all this dust come from?" the Doctor asked, "I thought this place was an ice planet."

The engineer laughed coldly.

"They didn't tell you much when you arrived did they?" His face grew dark as he pointed to the structure they were approaching, "It's not dust. It's ash. From the furnaces in there."

"And this is the result?" asked the Doctor, looking out at the endless rolling dunes beyond the windows. The desert of ash stretched to the horizon in every direction now, the Holdover was not even visible, buried behind high dunes of gray and black. "How much power can they possibly need in there?"

“If they haven’t told you then it’s best you don’t know.” the engineer replied. “God knows I wish I hadn’t been told. Bad enough having to come as far as the station”.

They pulled into the depot at the end of the line. A sign, scrawled graffito style on the wall read *The Kayeff*.

“Place is bad news all round if you ask me.” the engineer added, bringing the rail car to a halt. “Sooner this is all over and we can get away from here, the better I say.”

“You don’t approve of the place then I take it?” the Doctor asked, stroking his beard, looking out at the imposing walls that towered over them.

“You’re joking, aren’t you? How could anyone approve of a place like this?” the engineer’s voice was thick with disgust.

The Doctor said nothing, hoping that, in the silence, the engineer would elaborate a little further on the nature of the place. But the Doctor felt the waves of unwillingness coming off the man like light off a supernova.

“You’re really going to go in there then?” asked the engineer finally.

“That’s the problem with this line of work.” sighed the Doctor, adjusting his jacket. “You go where you are needed. Whether you want to or not.”

“Tell me about it,” the engineer replied darkly.

As he stepped off onto the platform, the Doctor turned to the man. “You said you’re being shipped out soon. Being shut down?”

“At any moment, apparently.” the engineer replied. “All of us. Typical Time Lord bureaucracy forcing an inspection on us in the last days!”

“Indeed.” the Doctor said. “Perhaps they weren’t ... fully informed of what’s going on here.”

The engineer laughed bitterly. “If you believe that, you’ll believe anything.”

He gave a small nod and closed the doors as the monorail pulled out of the station, back down the line. The Doctor watched on as it disappeared into the ash dunes.

The Doctor entered a large, high-ceilinged, long room with a a heavy mechanised door at the end. A room to wait in. A place to *queue* in. Functional. Cold. He had seen places like this before and was suddenly very aware of not only how deserted the place was, but how silent it was.

There was no noise, not even the sound of a generator, which was odd considering that his driver had informed him that the ash fields outside were the result of furnaces here in the Kayeff.

How could such waste be produced without any sound?

At the end of the hall, above the doorway , a sign declared: 'For Gallifrey.'

Walking toward it, the weary Time Lord imagined the countless masses who must have queued here, expectantly awaiting salvation from the horrors of the war. Men, women, children. Soldiers, too badly injured or too mentally unhinged from the atrocities they had witnessed to be able to defend their home anymore, all pinning their last sliver of hope on whatever lay beyond that door.

With a sigh filled with a thousand years of witnessing the worst things creation had to offer, the Doctor steadied himself and pushed open the door.

He found himself in a dark room, dimensions far exceeding the natural shape and size of the exterior. The space was filled by row upon row of standing cylinders. No. Not cylinders. As his eyes adjusted to the light he realised they were TARDISes. Thousands of naked, pre-chameleonic TARDISes.

He approached the door of one and reached for the door release.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Doctor." boomed a voice that seemed to issue from the very room itself.

"Why would that be, Goren?" the Doctor replied. "What dirty little secret do you not want me to uncover?"

In the middle distance he saw the light on top of one of the capsules change from red to a deep blue. There was a hiss as the door panel slid open

"You may as well come in Doctor." Goren's disembodied voice echoed around the chamber. "We are just about to finish up here, you can do no harm now. In fact, you really couldn't have come at a better time"

The Doctor made his way to the opening. The interior, a bastardised Type Ninety-three TARDIS console room, had been transformed into a sort of central control area laid out like a lecture theatre. Hundreds of engineers, members of the Perpetual Watch, were seated in rows, manipulating mini-consoles in front of them. On the wall, a massive bank of monitors filled the space, floor to ceiling; all showing what seemed to be the same image repeated over and over.

The Doctor couldn't make it out. He moved towards the screen but suddenly stopped in his tracks. A strange, but somehow familiar feeling of nausea descended upon him … of fear and foreboding. It overwhelmed him, causing him to stumble and fall to the floor.

Then Goren was before him.

"I am sorry, Doctor." Goren said. "But that's about as far as you can go."

"Some kind of force-field?" the Doctor asked, dizziness keeping him from making out Goren with any real clarity and preventing him from looking at the image on the

monitors.

"Oh, I would imagine a simple force-field would be far too easy for you to breach, Doctor." replied Goren. "This is something much more powerful. It permeates this … facility, growing stronger by the moment. The Perpetual Watch are trained to tolerate it."

Goren gestured to the row upon row of people, working at their stations.

"As am I," replied the Doctor, standing up, his vision clear. And yet the dark, evil feeling that infected the place stayed with him, preventing him from acting, "and, Goren. Don't call me 'Doctor.'"

Goren smiled, shaking his head sadly.

"Whatever you call yourself now and whatever mission you were sent here to accomplish, I am afraid it is far, far too late."

The Doctor stared at the wall of screens. Able to see clearly now, he saw that each showed the same thing: A single figure standing restrained, tied to a cruciform on a grated metal pedestal.

Another wave of nausea gripped him, but this time it came from his natural sense of revulsion rather than any outside influence.

"Those are the refugees!" he shouted. "The people of Gallifrey. The injured. Children! What are you doing with them?"

"Look." said Goren.

On the screens, a yellowy brown gas began to drift down into the chamber from vents above. He could see the occupants all begin to realise what was happening. The terror, panic and primal fear that rose in their eyes as the deadly cloud engulfed them.

"My God, that's Charleur Gas … ," the Doctor said in a weak, pained voice. "The deadliest nerve agent that ever existed. The most painful and barbaric of deaths imaginable."

"Yes," drawled Goren. "As used on the battlefields of Warisia, Palecouth and Bone Harkum. I seem to recall that it was you who deployed it against the Daleks. A way of killing the mutant inside the casing. Ingenious, Doctor. We have simply improved the formula, adapted it to the biology of Gallifreyans. It has proven to be quite effective."

The Doctor watched the monitors, openmouthed in horror as the gas cloud slowly filled each chamber. He could still make out the shape of each figure, worse, he could still see their faces, writhing in their restraints, eyes bulging to the point of bursting as, in their panic, they inhaled more and more of the noxious yellow fumes of Charleur.

Among them, he saw Vanus. Saw his thin face twisted in agony. His mouth open wide.

Then the screaming began.

There was no sound coming from the monitors but it could be heard coming

through from outside.

"Why, Goren?" said the Doctor in a quiet, dejected voice. "To what end?"

"Why?" replied Goren. "To win the war of course."

Keeping his eyes on the monitor showing Vanus, the Doctor watched as the skin begin to sizzle on his exposed arms, smoke issuing from his flesh. Blue-grey plumes mingling with the yellow gas. Rapidly, the skin began to boil and blister, angry red bubbles raced across his writhing, contorted body and instantly burst launching molten pus across his already devastated forms until there was little left that was distinguishable as having been flesh at all. Well aware that this was happening to thousands of others simultaneously, the Doctor dared not look at the other monitors. In his head, one thought remained: *I should have killed him myself.*

"End it, Goren." pleaded the Doctor. "In all of what is decent, make it stop."

"The beauty of it is, Doctor," said Goren, a note of pride in his voice, "that when they regenerate, they will die all over again. That is when we will start up the extractors to drain the regeneration energy from them before their bodies can absorb it all." Goren scanned the Doctor's mortified expression, reveling in the sheer torment that the man was going through.

"Then, once we have drained the energy we instigate a paradox loop and begin the process all over again. You see now, why we needed to house all this," he said waving an arm at the bank of screens, "within the confines of these time capsules? Without them the instability of so many paradoxes operating at once in the same section of space time could collapse this entire star system in on itself. Safety first Doctor, safety first."

He began to move back to his display panel. "Of course the beauty of this method is that we can extract up to five full regeneration cycles from each subject. That's sixty regenerations per subject in mere minutes thanks to the collective fields of so many paradoxes working in proximity." He paused for a moment before adding, "Well, minutes for us. This control capsule runs on a high speed timeline. We can fast forward to the end, as it were. Incredible really."

He allowed himself a wry smile as he added, "Welcome to the Killing Floor Doctor. Or as it has become known, the 'K.F.' "

"This is insanity!" raged the Doctor. "These are your own people Goren, Time Lords, soldiers, women and children! You're not just killing them, your forcing them to endure their own death over and over! Its beyond barbaric, its sadistic!"

"It is necessary!" roared Goren, turning back to the Doctor, his metal fist raised in a manic triumph.

"I will not allow this." The Doctor growled, a flame of fury burning behind his grey eyes, "I will find a way to end this abomination."

Goren smiled darkly and approached him, their faces almost touching.

"I admire your optimism Doctor, but we are already finished." Goren raised his gauntlet to the screen and made a sweeping gesture. "This is to be the final batch. We have all we need. See Doctor, the final phase begins. We are implementing the Emergency Sanction."

"The Emergency Sanct… ," the Doctor began, but then stopped as the realisation hit him. The reason he had come here to investigate the true nature of the Holdover, posing as a refugee, had all been to divert him. To get him far away from Gallifrey, without his TARDIS. *The Emergency Sanction*; discussed by the High Council and the War Council, and pushed again and again by the Black Order. Once again he became overwhelmed by the familiar feeling of a dark force filling him with dread and nausea. He was unable to move. Like in the Death Zone. Like the Tomb…

"No." was all he could say. A brittle, useless *no*.

Every screen was a haze of yellow-brown fog now, and at the centre of each was the silhouette of a person; a mother, a son, a soldier. Each of them no longer writhing in their restraints as the gas scorched the flesh from their bones. After the agony of the boiling and blistering, the intensity of the heat was turning flesh into ash. Most, it seemed, had passed out or possibly expired completely. They were the lucky ones. The Doctor could see others, those to whom the gas had destroyed their respiratory systems. They were coated in their own blood, spewed up from the ravaged remains of their insides. Unable to scream or even breathe, they were still very much aware of what was happening to them, as one by one each figure simply ignited like a log on a fire.

"Start the extractors, clear out the chambers and prepare the siphons for the regenerations." ordered Goren to the assembled technicians.

There was a collective whoosh as massive turbines whirled into life in each capsule, drawing out the gas along with the dust, ash and smoke that that was once a person. As the fog began to clear the Doctor could see the travesty that remained in the standing shackles, little more than smoldering skeletons, there was no flesh left anymore, all that remained was shriveled, baked muscle scorched onto blackened bones.

The Doctor felt sick.

On the screen the charred, skeletal forms before him slowly began to radiate a soft orange glow which steadily intensified.

"Cut the extractors and start the siphons." commanded Goren.

"Damn it, you can't do this!" screamed the Doctor as tears streamed down his cracked face. "You just can't!"

The Doctor dropped to his knees, his eyes unable to turn away from the horrors on the screens as the amber glow of regeneration began to rebuild the ruined figures, muscle and tissue re-growing in an instant.

There was a roar as the siphons powered up, absorbing the regeneration energy, sucking it away from the prone figures. All the extra raw power that would be used to

sculpt a new form, a new identity, all drained away leaving only the bare minimum to restore the physical body to a point where it would sustain life again.

"Restart the loops and begin the process again." Goren looked down at the Doctor, hunched over on the floor. "And set the controls to automatic, take us to the very end, I think our visitor has seen enough."

The monitors were turned off and the familiar groan and wheeze of dematerialisation filled the air as the control capsule transported itself forward in time to the point of the final deaths of each occupant.

"The process is complete, Doctor." said Goren. "We have solid life signs from the casket."

"The casket in which you transported him from the Death Zone to here," the Doctor said, "against the wishes of the High Council. Against the President. Against the people."

In front of them the entire bank of screens lit up with a single image, a large obsidian casket, bathed in a harsh white light and attached to a coil of cables and tubes connecting it to a turbine of some sort.

"As we speak, Doctor," said Goren, "the High Council has been deposed. The Perpetual Watch has seen to that. The Generals will come around too. We have many supporters, Doctor."

"I will stop you." said the Doctor. "I will not let this … atrocity go unpunished. You have my word."

"You will try, Doctor." replied Goren with a sigh. "But that is to be expected. I very much doubt your chances of success. You would take on both Time Lords and Daleks? With the universe and time itself in terminal peril? I doubt it, Doctor."

The Doctor closed his eyes. His fists clenched. He rested his mind and tried to see the path in front of him, the timeline. But all he could see was war, and the fog was too dense, the chronology too twisted for him to be able to see clearly.

"Now Doctor," said Goren, "shall we go out and meet the newborn?"

With a hiss the casket split down the centre and slid open, an orange steam coming from within it filled the chamber. A new smell could not mask the stench of death that clung to every molecule of the place. A shape became visible through the haze: a tall man with jet black hair and piercing green-blue eyes. Wrapped in crimson swaddling, screaming like an infant, the figure stumbled forward; wisps of regeneration clinging onto him like weeds.

The Doctor and Goren watched as he came out into the chamber, looking around him, still screaming and shaking in sheer incomprehension.

His eyes fixed on the Doctor. He stopped screaming.

He smiled. A sly, ironic smile.

“Behold Doctor.” said Goren, his voice filled with sordid triumph. “Rassilon returns!”

Climbing the Mountain

by Lance Parkin

Presumably the planet had a name, but no one used it any more. So he and it had one thing in common, at least.

He'd landed the TARDIS at the foot of a mountain that was this world's only strategically significant feature. An idiosyncratic mix of primeval comet strikes and semi-recent volcanism meant the rocks in this one mountain of this one planet were veined with a rare crystal the Daleks used for their gunsticks, and which no one else used for anything.

The Dalek mining machines were gunmetal grey, resembling millipedes the size of railway trains. There were dozens of them, crawling over the slopes on a thousand stubby legs, gnawing away at the rock like a caterpillar on a leaf. Tearing, munching noises filled the air.

In the normal course of events, the Daleks would have landed one Saucer, strip-mined the mountain and left. The populated areas of the planet were on the opposite hemisphere, and the civilisation here had barely begun its industrial revolution. You could never underestimate the sadism of the Daleks, it was always possible they'd have conquered the locals, but they'd literally have had to go out of their way to do so. Far more likely, the Daleks would have been and gone in a year or so, leaving a pile of rubble where a mountain had stood, and the only locals to have suffered would have been a few confused geologists centuries hence.

This was not the normal course of events. This was the fourth decade of the *plak-than-qua*, a word that combined concepts of armed insurgency and disruption of industrial processes. The word had no etymological roots in any of the native languages, you wouldn't find it in any Dalek dictionary, either. The word was Kalkravian in origin. The Kalkravians – or enough of them, at least, to make the whole race known for it - were arms dealers, agents for mercenaries, stirrers of the pot. The fact that people here had known the word *plak-than-qua* was the smoking gun, it was evidence that a *third* set of aliens were actively involved with the affairs of this world. And the fact that the Kalkravians would not evolve for half a million years was the only clue needed to identify that third race.

A dozen delta-winged jets screeched overhead, released their missiles and banked away, hard. The explosions were impressive, and did some damage to the Dalek mining

machines. They stopped at least two in their tracks. Explosions blossomed across the mountainside. One mining machine lost its footing for a few seconds. He was too far away to have to worry about the devastation.

Dalek anti-aircraft batteries had begun to return fire before the jets had banked. One plane was hit square on, pretty much vanished into thin air. Another had a wing clipped, and spiralled down, exploding on the ground. The others got away. Now, though, a second squadron of jet bombers came in from the opposite direction, targeting the batteries. It was a good, simple plan – get the enemy to reveal the locations of their defences with a feint, destroy the enemy guns.

The Daleks' defences, though, merely shot down the missiles aimed at them, then a couple of the aircraft that had fired them. They'd been big planes, the sort that normally had large crews. Who even knew who was flying them? The attackers were not native to this world. The local population had been wiped out more than thirty years ago. The planes wouldn't be flying themselves, that would be far more expensive than using organic pilots, you'd save that sort of AI for passenger liners and cargo ships. Were they volunteers or conscripts? The question seemed archaic, now, one from an era when you got a choice whether to fight or not.

The rest of the squadron got away, and the Daleks, for whatever inscrutable, Daleky, reason didn't mount a pursuit.

'Why would they?' he said out loud. 'The squadron will come back to the mountain soon enough, there's no need to take the mountain to the squadron.'

A minute or so later, the damaged mining machines started up again. Most of the machines had never stopped, or even slowed. The dozens of contrails, the only evidence the planes had ever been here, were already beginning to disperse.

Typical Time Lord intervention. Crude, indirect, nothing you'd call a plan. Some minor bureaucrat would have opened up a space warp between the Kalkravian home systems and this world, and patted himself on the back when the arms dealers took the bait. 'Why do our own dirty work when there are plenty of species out there spoiling for a fight?' he and his colleagues would have agreed, sitting around some desk, or over a drink, before moving down the list to the next star system. Nibble away at the enemy, never leave your own footprints. This way, they would keep one Dalek ship away from the front, place one more infinitesimal drag on the Daleks' war effort. Victory!

And if worse came to worse, then the planet could always be shuffled off the map altogether, deleted from history or just smacked in such a way it would be propelled out of the galaxy. A drastic move, even now, and often quite a pointless one – the Daleks could move planets around, too, if they needed to.

He knew what needed to be done, and estimated it would take him about twenty minutes.

The Daleks captured him seventeen minutes later. He'd been climbing down from one of the mining machines when one of them cornered him. It didn't know him on sight, ran only a cursory scan for the most obvious weapons, it didn't get him to turn out his pockets. It announced it might throw the prisoner into the maw at the front of the mining machine - a taunt designed to scare him, rather than something it was likely to do, but Daleks were capricious, and it could easily have decided to make good on its threat. So there was a degree of relief when, instead, it shoved him up the mountainside to a small, squat administration building.

He was made to sit down in its main chamber while an Interrogator was sent for. There weren't many Daleks on the planet; all of them were here for a reason. Any Dalek would be a formidable military threat, but these were mostly miners, engineers and technicians with tasks to perform.

He sat, a little stiffly, on the floor. The same familiar electronic heartbeat filled the air, bringing with it the whiff of ozone and tingling from the static electricity. The interior of the TARDIS had changed over the years, but Dalek architecture had remained the same from one end of the galaxy to the other, in every time zone. It was almost comforting in its consistency. As were the Daleks. You could set your watch by them. He'd rather fight them than his fellow Time Lords.

The Interrogator swept into the room. 'Stand,' it ordered, although he was already halfway to his feet.

It looked at him carefully, its eyestalk moving smoothly up and down. It had a blue and chrome livery, some kind of novel attachment to its arm: A glass ball that looked like it contained scientific instruments of some kind.

'What were you doing on the mining machine?'

'Improving its efficiency.'

The Dalek stood motionless for a moment. 'Explain.'

'Well, I happened to be on the mountainside, when I saw a mining machine. I didn't recognise the design. I'm afraid I don't know which corporation owns you.'

'We are the Daleks.'

He pursed his lips, made a show of racking his brains. 'No. Doesn't ring a bell. Daylicks?'

'Daleks.'

'Sorry, no. Anyway - '

'No one owns the Daleks.'

'You're simple mining robots, yes? Built to drive and maintain the big machines? Not really designed for mountainous terrain, are you? Can't imagine you down a mine. You're a bit cheap and cheerful.'

'We are - '

'Oh, I doubt it matters. As I say, I was passing and I saw that the drive unit on the mining machine wasn't running as well as it might, so I made a few adjustments. It works much better now.'

The Interrogator left the room. It returned after about two minutes with another Dalek, a red one.

'This is the Chief Engineer. You will explain what you did.'

He did. It was a simple software fix. One that allowed the machines to run just a little longer between servicing and dig faster and deeper. One that made it adopt defensive postures during aerial bombardment.

'I would say,' he concluded, 'that you'll be able to get through that whole mountain range in half the time.'

The Daleks let him go. Well, they didn't quite let him go, but they didn't tie him up or exterminate him, so it was easy enough for him to get out of the administration building and back down the mountainside.

He looked back over his shoulder; saw Daleks busy working on each of the mining machines, implementing his changes.

He returned to the TARDIS. The Daleks would be gone from here in a year, now. The jet bombers had just been prolonging the Dalek occupation, slowing them down a little. There was no risk the Daleks here would be destroyed, they would get their precious crystals in the end. Perhaps, without his help, it would have taken another decade. Without the Daleks here, the alien soldiers, mercenaries, resistance units, terrorists … whoever they were … they would either decide to settle here peacefully, or they'd move on. This nameless place would be free from the war.

He had been here an hour. This was the ninth planet he'd visited since he'd woken. Nine wasn't enough. Of course nine wasn't enough. This was triage, not surgery. *Countless* other worlds were burning.

He flicked the switch that sent the TARDIS back into the Vortex, steeling himself for his next adventure.

Gardening

by Sami Kelish

Somewhere on Gallifrey, in the river valley just beyond the mountains and about as far from cities as a place could be, the old woman lived in a quiet little cottage within a quiet little dome, where she kept her garden. For far more years than she had ever thought to count, she tended to the plants and flowers in her care - a meticulously catalogued collection of each and every plant species known to inhabit the planet, dutifully observed and maintained. Each day, she doted on her charges with the greatest of attention. Bright flowers and shimmering patches of grass were fed and watered, trees were carefully pruned to prevent them from overextending their reach, and succulents were kept in sunlight and warmth. But most of all, she gave them love.

Researchers would come to her from far away to seek her wisdom, or to study this species or that. Visitors came to see her collection too, marvelling at plants both exotic and familiar, and sometimes staying for a cup of tea among the flowers. At some point however, the visitors slowly stopped coming. It was hard to say exactly when it began, but she was certain she had not seen another person for a good many years.

It seemed she had been forgotten.

The world, she supposed, had moved on well enough without her. The cycle of growth and decay and rebirth continued. Indeed, when her own body had been worn down, too tired to keep pace with her work, she would shed her fading and threadbare skin, and learn to navigate a new body. At times, she wondered after the state of the shining spires of the Capitol. She would muse upon how long it had been since she last held a conversation with anyone, or for that matter, even seen another person. She had lost count of how many years it had been since she had held someone's hand, felt the warmth of an affectionate touch, or heard a pair of heartbeats other than her own. Countless seasons came and went, and the old woman continued her work. Winter became spring, spring became summer, summer became autumn, and autumn became winter again.

But this winter was the longest she had seen in all her years, and showed no sign of turning to spring.

The day's work began as every day did, with the old woman's linen skirts flowing behind her as she methodically crossed the length and breadth of the garden, instruments

in hand and heavy pockets laden with garden tools, taking measurements and readings of every specimen as she went.

Humidity for the winter vegetables planting was 0.02% above what it should be for the time of year, she noted. Not an unacceptable deviation mind, but something she would need to monitor closely in case any adjustments needed to be made. More worrying, perhaps, was the fact that temperature controls were struggling to maintain acceptable levels in the warmer areas of the enclosure. She reasoned that she would need to take a proper look at the temperature system when she had finished her rounds, as well as the humidity regulators – if she had time.

There was a particular species of lichen that the old woman always took a moment to say good morning to. It held no exceptional beauty by any standards, though she found the mossy little tangle of tiny gold branches to be quite sweet. It was a variety that was known for thriving in the most barren of weather, resilient in the face of strain or strange conditions. She admired that endurance. The snow lilies, often found alongside them just where the forests gave away to tundra, were delicate and ephemeral creatures by contrast, whose diminutive silver blooms would swoon and fall away in response to even the slightest shift in temperature, or a moment's too much sun. A rare and shimmering orchid luminesced in iridescent shades of green for exactly thirty-two microspans at the same time each morning of its life cycle, from first bloom to last falling petal. The old woman made sure to witness it on time every morning. This is how it had gone for as many years as she could recall.

She was stirred from her gentle ruminations by the lurching groans of an approaching ship which she could hear materialising just outside her front door with a shuddering thud. It sounded as if the ship was in egregiously poor repair. Visitors, she wondered, after so long? Perhaps not exactly, she thought, smiling to herself - but it seemed, after all, that they remembered her.

She rose gingerly from the flowerbed, tidying her hair into a long, low ponytail, and brushing the sandy soil as best she could from her linens. She dashed back through the rows of vegetables, through the ferns and the stone fruit trees, through the little conservatory overgrown with vines, narrowly missing one of the wicker chairs (which always seemed wider than she remembered). Passing through her little kitchen and sitting room, she hurriedly reached the front of the cottage. Her linens trailed about her like the flutter of a moth's wings as she haphazardly glided towards the ship. It was blue and named, for some unfathomable reason, Police Box. She stood, hands folded, at the ship's door, took a deep breath, and awaited her visitor.

A moment passed before the door quietly swung inward. A gentleman peered out from the darkness and stepped carefully onto the soft earth before him, regarding the old woman with what seemed to be a measure of confusion. His clothes were dark and worn, but she supposed the boots would at least withstand the muddier areas of the work well. He brushed a hand over his lightly greying hair, and adjusted his well-weathered scarf. At a guess, she would have estimated him to be well past the halfway point of his regeneration cycle. Indeed, if a face was anything to go by, he must have been somewhere in late middle

age.

She had rather expected someone younger.

"Oh," he startled, softening into a worn and weary smile, and greeting her with a graceful bow. "Why, hello there, milady."

"I don't mean to offend," she said, puzzling over the man, "but I had rather expected someone younger."

"Excuse me?" he blinked.

"Oh, I do beg your pardon," she blushed, flustering slightly. "That must have come out wrong. You're the first person I've seen in, oh, a good few lifetimes, and I fear I'm out of practice. What I mean is, it's going to take you a good few centuries to learn everything there is to know about this place, so I thought they'd have chosen someone with much more of their working life ahead of them, with all due respect. Oh, but do come in!"

"I'm afraid you must have me mistaken for someone else," replied the man, following her through the cottage door.

She felt her enthusiasm plucked from her, and left to fall, withered, to the floor. She had thought she had finally been sent an apprentice.

By no means did the old woman believe that she ought to retire straight away. Nor did she wish to abandon her charges to anyone, for so long as she had the means to tend to them herself. Indeed, she felt there were a good few years left in her body; her hands had not yet worn so paper-thin, and she worked as well as she needed to. However, an apprentice well ahead of her winding down would not be unwelcome. It would take nearly a lifetime of work to teach all the intricacies of the garden to someone new. At times she wondered if this body may well be her last, and whether it would see the coming of spring.

"I don't suppose you're at all keen to take up a career in the horticultural sciences," she said with a maudlin smile.

"No, I don't suppose so either," replied the man.

"Never mind," she sighed. "Shall I make us a cup of tea?"

"Yes, yes, go on then," he shrugged, following her into the warm kitchen. "I have always had a fondness for a nice cup of tea, you know."

"Me too," she smiled, searching for the second kitchen chair somewhere beneath the pile of notes it had long since become home to. "You will pardon the state of the house, I hope. As I've said, I can't remember the last time I've seen anyone who wasn't, well, a type of plant."

"And you didn't find it strange to be cooped up alone for so long?" he asked.

"Well, you get busy getting things done, don't you? Trust me, I get more than enough excitement here," she said, her smile brimming with enthusiasm, checking the teacups for egregious traces of dust. "Waking up in the morning to find that this is the

day the snow cherry tree has begun to bud, collecting a bumper crop of mountain leaves to make tea, taking inventory of the seed stores, there really isn't a dull moment. But ... I think you're here because something's gone wrong, hasn't it?"

His response was cut short by the soft rolling boil of the kettle. The old woman carefully poured the water over the small parcel of herbs she had placed in each up, and set them on the table. She noticed the way the tone of the clinking little spoon against the worn clay teacups changed pitch just slightly when she added a drip of honey to the brew. The man had accepted his tea with a nod of gratitude, cradling its warmth in his calloused hands, and blunt fingers which seemed to carry the kind of patina that could only be ground in from countless years of thankless work. She glanced down at her own hands, and knew it well.

"There," she smiled. "You'll like this, I think. It's a very warming infusion."

"Thank you, umm - sorry, I don't think I got your name," he said, giving the contents of his teacup an exploratory sniff.

"I'm - oh." She hesitated, reaching back into her memory. How silly, she thought, to forget one's own name. "It's been so long since anyone called me anything. I'm quite sure I had one. What might it have been? I think it might have started with V? No, F. Or was it B? Oh dear, what sort of a name do I look like to you?"

The man hesitated. "I'm not sure it's my place to name you," he suggested, with an almost apologetic tone.

"No, I don't suppose so," she said. "Never mind then. I haven't needed a name in so long, I can go on a little longer without one. What about you?"

The man shook his head. "My name's not important," he said.

"Fancy that," she replied, "what sort of parents would give their beautiful child a name like Not Important?"

"There are worse names, surely," he grinned.

She could see in the man something of a kindred spirit, she thought. Nevertheless he was also a little like the tedious old fusspots she had been quite pleased to get away from when the opportunity arose to begin what became her life's work, all those years ago. The company of plants was far preferable to the Capitol, by a considerable margin, but she could not object to a nice cup of tea with this rather unusual gentleman. She recognised the look of quiet, pleasant surprise that coloured his features on first sip, the moment where sorrows were forgotten and worries yielded to the comforting warmth of a good tea. It was away as quickly as it had appeared, supplanted again by tired determination.

"So," he began, "how quickly can you prepare your things to evacuate? We don't have time to do much, but if there's anything - "

"Evacuate? Whatever for?" She cut him off, puzzled. She wondered if she had heard him correctly. She had seen no emergencies. The weather outside the garden was a touch cold for the time of year, but a cold snap was no great thing, and certainly no cause

for evacuation.

He regarded her as though she were mad.

“Are you seriously telling me that you haven’t noticed there’s a war on?” he asked incredulously.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she scoffed at the suggestion. “Of course there isn’t a war on. If you’re here to have fun at the expense of an old woman’s nerves, then I should get back to my work.”

“Ridiculous?” he protested. “Madam, I’ve never been more serious about anything in all of my lives.”

The gravity in his eyes told her everything she needed to know. There was a war on. She surmised that this would at least go some way to explaining why the garden had seen no visitors for so long.

“Oh dear,” she said gravely, taking a bracing sip of her cooling tea. “Where?”

“Here,” he replied. “Everywhere. Gallifrey. And out there, in space. It’s devastating worlds.”

“Oh dear,” she said again. What a silly thing to say, she thought, but nothing else came to mind. For such a thing to reach the old woman in her quiet little cottage within a quiet little dome where she kept her garden, as far from politics as a place could be, it must have been terrible indeed. “Well, when you put it that way, I suppose it is rather a big thing not to notice.”

He told her of the war, of Daleks and weapons, of time and loss: she listened, first with disbelief, then acceptance.

“And you hadn’t noticed a thing?” he asked again, almost to himself. “Fancy that.”

“Why should I? Do you know how long it’s been since I’ve seen a face apart from my own? I expect they’ve all been terribly busy,” she shrugged.

“And you never thought to go looking, did you,” he said, regarding her with a quiet curiosity.

“Once or twice, perhaps, but I’ve got far too much work to do,” she said. “Besides, it’s not as though I’d ever be able to leave the greenhouse, is it? I swear, if I don’t adjust the humidity regulators at least once a day, I’d have some very unhappy ferns. The archive needs me. But ... oh dear.”

How sad it was to know that the world had become so troubled in her absence, she thought. The man dug his hands into his heavy pockets, producing a small hip flask. He offered her the first swig, which she quietly declined.

“Suit yourself,” he said, taking a small sip. “The Dalek offensives are growing. The vortex itself is in shreds, time and space bent out of all recognition. You won’t be safe here much longer.”

"But surely, this place is of no strategic value as far as they're concerned," she protested, finishing the last of her tea. "As far as anyone can tell, I'm just a little gardener tending to her little cottage, isn't that so?"

"It doesn't matter. Listen closely," he said. She thought she could hear something, just a little, far off in the distance.

It sounded a little like fireworks.

"Oh dear," she said.

It seemed as though the sky had grown darker since the man had arrived, but at this time of day, she knew it to be impossible.

"How quickly can you be ready to go?" he asked.

"Oh goodness no, I can't go anywhere," she said. "You don't know anything about me, do you?"

"My scanners detected the energy signals coming from this place. I honestly didn't know what I could expect to find at all," replied the man. "Tell me, then."

"Well, there needs to be someone here to tend to the garden, doesn't there?" She set the teacups beside that pile of crockery she had meant to get around to cleaning, just as soon as she was not so busy. She could have blushed at the state of the kitchen, which was in no way prepared for visitors, though the man seemed not the sort of visitor to mind. "Won't you come through?"

She admitted to feeling a certain sense of pride on seeing the look of surprise and joy when a visitor passed through the little conservatory and saw the garden for the first time, but his was a look of unwavering confusion. She watched the little gears turn over in his mind for a moment, and then…. clarity.

"Oh, of course it's dimensionally transcendental!" he exclaimed at last, shaking his head. "Well, that explains it, doesn't it?"

"Of course it's dimensionally transcendental, you funny man," she frowned. "It's state of the art, or at least it was when we built it. How else would you expect me to keep an archive of every plant species from every ecosystem on all of Gallifrey without a greenhouse that's dimensionally transcendental? You didn't seriously think I was just a mad old woman with a little front garden, did you? I'm a proper scientist, I'll have you know, and this is a very important facility."

"So I can see," he said, scrutinizing the humidity controls.

"Mind you don't touch anything," she cautioned. He raised his hands in response.

"Wouldn't dream of it," he replied.

"Good. Come on, then," she said, beckoning him to follow. "I'll try to give you some little idea of what I'm working to preserve. You can help me finish my rounds."

He followed with what she sensed was a politely diminishing patience as she walked

him through the conifers and the tall grasses and the wildflowers that lived on the fringes of the sand. He stopped at one of the silver-leafed giants that kept watch over one of the corners of the garden, tucked his hands in his pockets, and sighed.

"We had trees just like this one where I grew up," he said quietly. "You wouldn't recognise much of it there now."

"It's been so long, I expect I wouldn't recognise much of anything," she agreed. She considered just how much the world had changed without her; whether those robes with those horribly ostentatious collars had long passed out of fashion, how many presidents had come and gone, and whether they had ever fixed that bug in the Type 7 ship's fault locator. It must have been upgraded at least to Type 12 by now, she thought. She wondered if the forests and the plains and the meadows still hummed with shining life. "You grew up near the mountains, then."

"Yes, near the mountains," he replied. There was a wistful tone, threatening at the edges of his voice, but he blinked it away.

"I remember it well," she said, "or at least as well as I remember anything these days."

"How much of this will you need to take with you?" he asked, his fingertips brushing through the thick foliage of a cluster of low-growing trees.

"You can't possibly still suggest I leave. Look how much I have to take care of! If the world is in as much conflict as you say, and as damaged ... well, somebody's going to have to be able to replant, and nurture. I can help make the world healthy again when it's safe to do so, but not without my garden. I shudder to think of a sterile world living on nothing but artificially replicated foods, ecosystems irreparably destroyed. Gallifrey wouldn't be able to sustain itself for long. Would you mind holding my shears? The stone fruits need a touch of work."

She was quite right. It seemed the winter plum tree was budding, and would need encouragement for the new shoots to thrive. The old woman collected her shears from the man, and tended to the tree.

"I can't see why the Daleks would see any point in bothering with a funny little greenhouse anyway, would they?" she continued, carefully pruning the old growth. She thought it best to continue as though nothing was the matter, so as not to worry the plants. She could not be sure how an air of anxiety might affect their growth, after all. The man sighed.

"The Daleks have one directive, and that's to exterminate. It's not like they're going to look at the cottage, shrug, and bugger off, is it?" he argued. "It's just as easy for them to blow it up, so when they find it, they will. And if my TARDIS picked up your energy signals, they will too. They probably already have. I can't leave you in that kind of danger."

She had to concede that the man was probably right. It seemed now slightly less of a strain to hear the fireworks. It would not be safe for long.

“How bad is it out there?” she asked. His expression was grave. She understood. “What do I do?”

The man seemed to consider for a moment and then, once again, offered her a drink from his flask. She was loath to accept, but did so, in the interest of courage. It burned, vitreous and vile, like the state of the world.

“What do I do?” she repeated.

“Well,” he said, muttering to himself as he waved his screwdriver at a patch of root vegetables, “the spatial implications of one dimensionally transcendental space within another, aside - and trust me, I’d rather not be doing with getting stuck in a space loop - I could, if I had to, materialise the TARDIS around the greenhouse, and evacuate the whole thing. Only ... hmm.”

“Hmm?” she asked.

“Well,” he said again, tapping his screwdriver against the heel of his palm, “it would put a strain on the TARDIS, and I’m not entirely sure where we’d evacuate the place to, and we’ll definitely break some crockery, but -”

“No,” said the woman.

“No?” asked the man. The old woman bowed her head.

“This system is too delicate to be moved. Any change, even the littlest of fluctuations, could upset the balance I’ve worked so hard to keep. Every species has its own specifications - temperature, humidity, and light. So many of them rely on one another. If any of these aren’t kept within just the right range of percentages, we could see irreparable damage to countless ecosystems. And if it’s too volatile out there for specimens to be recovered,” she hesitated, taking in a shuddering, worried breath. “What would become of us? We could lose the archive altogether. How would we rebuild our world without a record of what needs to grow? I can’t bear to think of it.”

She supposed it may be possible, if enough were left whole, to travel back out into the world, gather new specimens, and start over. However, what would have been a grand adventure in her youth now seemed daunting, almost terrifying, and definitely impossible. There were already, no doubt, wastelands beyond her walls that could not be recovered so easily. The risk of failure was overwhelming. Besides, she suspected that this body may well be her last, and questioned whether she would see the coming of spring.

The idea of struggling to remain afloat on the heavy velvet seas of the Citadel did not sit well with the old woman. Worse still, she thought of the garden falling into disrepair. She thought of daisies grasping in vain for a shred of sun, and vines, slouching and limp; she thought of trees shedding their bark and leaves crumbling to dust; she thought of parched roots and grasses grown brittle and sallow. She felt a fierceness welling within her, the need to keep her garden safe from harm.

“Look, if I reroute some of the power from the greenhouse systems, I should be able to erect a rudimentary shield around you,” he said, his screwdriver buzzing at the garden’s

control panel. “It won’t withstand everything, but it’s better than nothing.”

“Fine,” she agreed with a sigh, “but use the power from the cottage. I can survive without it, but the garden can’t.”

“Do you no sense of self-preservation left?” he puzzled, as she walked him back to the cottage.

“No,” she replied, “not at the expense of my garden. Do you?”

“Not always,” he conceded, “but I still think you’re mad to stay.”

“But it’s my choice,” she said.

The shield was simple enough to set up. A few transposed wires and the flip of a switch or two, and then, with a flash, it was running. She would have to heat the kettle the very old-fashioned way, and find ways of keeping warm. The cold found its way deeper into her bones than it used to now, and was decidedly inclined to stay.

“There,” he said, when he had finished. “I hope I’m not wrong in letting you choose to stay.”

“It’s my choice,” she repeated.

“I can’t change your mind?” he said, tucking his screwdriver away. She held his hand in hers with an insistent squeeze.

“No, but please tell them,” she said quietly, watching his sad eyes. “Let the people know we’re still here. When it’s safe to begin rebuilding have someone send for us.”

Let it be soon, she almost said, for she knew this body was to be her last and would not see the coming of spring.

The measures, she knew, were temporary, but she ensured silently that they remained in place as soon as the man’s ship disappeared with its grating, metallic wheeze. The temperature and humidity would regulate themselves as best they could, and on schedule. The light would brighten and fade as the days and nights shifted, and just as much rain as was needed would fall. But someone would have to harvest the little fruits, prune the dark tea trees, and keep the vines from entangling themselves inextricably in the equipment. Someone would need to keep inventory of the seed stores, and prepare them, when they were needed, for planting.

Her time was waning, and the world, it seemed, had moved on without her. She brushed the dust from her old linen apron, and returned to her work. The little rumblings from over the mountains were growing nearer. She waited.

Sleepwalking to Paradise

by Dan Barratt

Millie sat in the long grass gazing down on the sun drenched valley below. The people looked just like little ants, scurrying this way and that, busy over their work. As she watched, she could see a knot of people being guided up towards the drilling platform, and one of the chief technicians, perhaps her father, pointing to various pieces of machinery. Others moved between the temporary units that had been erected around the site, checking things off onto invisible clipboard lists, chatting busily to each other.

The day was perfectly still with not a cloud in the sky. The air was filled with the scent of wild meadow flowers between which insects buzzed busily in the increasing midday heat. Her father had warned her about staying too long out of doors when the suns were at their most intense. Soon the little ants would all scurry away into the coolness of their homes and rest until the heat became more bearable. Millie didn't care. She fully intended to make the most of her time in the sun.

The survey team had been travelling so long in the coldness of space. Much of the journey had been spent sleeping of course - 'coma time' the adults had called it - but the weeks spent awake on board that horrible space ship had seemed like months to Millie. Nothing but dark grey metal corridors and dark grey metal rooms. She cast her mind back to her home, to the days before they had left. Her father had explained that, owing to the length of the mission and the time they would be spending away, some of the parents would be allowed to take their families with them. This meant that it would be alright for Millie to go with him. At first she didn't want to go, but she knew she had no-one else to look after her.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the distant sound of a klaxon, and she watched all the tiny people as they slowly started their journey towards their little cabins. A few of the other children who were chasing each other and playing games stopped and ran to meet them. Gradually, the ramshackle collection of miniature buildings fell still, save for a single man, Millie's father. She watched for a moment or two as he scanned the horizon with his binoculars. She could just about make out his faint, distant voice as he called out: "Millicent!" A few moments more and he was gone.

This was the time Millie loved the best. She felt like she had the entire planet to herself. She was glad she'd stayed out, even if the heat was stifling. Thinking she'd better

find some shade, Millie took off over the brow of the hill and found a tree suitable for shelter. Lying down, completely submerged in the tall grass, she gazed up into the lush green canopy. Slender, twisting branches swooped down all around her, heavily laden with sweet, pungent blossom, the extremities almost brushing the ground. Here, the brilliance of the twin suns was rendered more delicate, forming dappled pools which shimmered over the soft grasses below. Millie closed her eyes and allowed her mind to drift back once again to her memories of home.

She picked her way through the tangled mass of people, through streets jammed with fume belching traffic. The air was thick with pollution. Even through the little white protective face mask covering her nose and mouth, the acrid taste of traffic fumes burned into her throat and filled her lungs. Arriving home from school, she showered and changed immediately, bundling the day's now spoilt clothing into the machine. As she gazed out over the sprawling city from her bedroom window high up in tower 2303, she could see nothing but grey. Not a patch of blue sky nor a single space of green.

The colony world appeared to languish in perpetual night and yet nothing seemed to rest. The machines droned on in the darkness, sleepless, ever turning, in a desperate attempt to recycle as much of the smog-filled atmosphere as possible whilst, alongside them, the refineries and food production facilities churned out more pollutants. This was the reality of the colony; a civilisation trapped within a vicious circle, edging slowly towards annihilation.

Then came the day of Millie's eighth birthday, the day that her father announced they would be leaving. Millie had reached home as normal to find her father waiting for her. Normally, Millie had to let herself in and start the evening's supper but tonight he was going to take her out for a special birthday meal. Later, as they sat in the restaurant munching their hamburgers, he told her about the project he had been working on. Millie remembered how special she had felt that evening. Daddy hardly ever talked about his secret work at the research institute. He told her all about the special mission they would be going on. And that was it; the beginning of their great adventure!

She felt she would never be able to return to that horrible grey oblivion. Now that she was here, in this beautiful place, she didn't want ever to leave …

There was a violent shuddering as the TARDIS collided recklessly with the hull of the gigantic battle cruiser. As the tiny blue box ripped into the ship's hull, an enormous welt opened up, immediately obscured by an outrush of smoke and debris. Improbable as it seemed, the tiny Police Box had exerted a force far beyond its apparent size. As the chain of explosions began to ripple out over the surface of the colossal war craft, loosening huge chunks of wreckage, its demise now seemed inevitable. Emerging from within the enormous craft came a deafening metallic voiced war cry, "EXTERMINATE!" and a terrifying bolt of energy was projected out, its magnesium brilliance slicing ferociously through the blackness. The tiny blue craft, having ricocheted off of the hull, narrowly avoided the bolt, but was sent whirling out into deep space. A few moments later, the immense leviathan

exploded in a holocaust of fire which radiated out into the void. The little Police Box was swept up in the aftermath and violently propelled on a new trajectory, caught in an inescapable tsunami of flame.

The TARDIS control room was a cacophony of noise. A tangle of metalwork and cables hung perilously low from the vaulted ceiling whilst huge plumes of smoke and steam seemed to burst angrily from every direction. A fiercely intense light burned through the tiny holes in the gantry flooring, radiating eddy filled columns which punched through the billowing clouds. Emerging from the swirling mass toward the central console stepped the thin figure of a man, dressed roughly in a battered brown leather coat, his sun-baked, lined face peppered with rough greying stubble. All the while, the monotonous distant droning of the cloister bell continued, warning of certain doom.

"Oh why doesn't that bloody thing shut up?" He punched the console angrily resulting in another warning siren, this time in the control room itself.

"Oh, for heaven's sake! What now? Don't you imagine I'm a little bit busy for all this?" he snapped tersely. He hit the console once more with the side of his fist and the sound was quickly silenced. The Time Lord had been alone for quite some time. It was necessary but he didn't like it. Destroying Dalek battle cruisers was not a job for two. Dependents just caused unnecessary worry, gave you too much to think about; definitely not what he needed right now.

"Right then. Let's hope you little blighters had enough time to tell the rest of your lot who was coming to get you because, frankly, I could do with the propaganda!" And with that, he stabbed away at the controls. The billowing clouds gradually dissipated. Another stab and the white circles which honeycombed the TARDIS walls flickered back to life. He glanced up at the tangled mass of cables above the console and shrugged his shoulders.

"Hmm. I can live with that."

He noticed the cloister bell was still sounding. "Can't live with that though ..." he mused wearily. "Can't live ... with ... that!" He was moving round the control console now, checking readouts, punching in data. He tried one of the console's many crank handles. Still the relentless tolling sound continued.

"What's the matter, old girl?" It wasn't until he noticed the scanner that he understood. As he gazed at the monitor it became immediately clear. He was looking down into a vast chasm of dazzling white, an enormous tract of magnesium brilliance in frozen suspension stretching across an infinity of darkness. In all his wanderings, he had never seen anything quite like this before.

"Never send to know for whom the bell tolls ..."

Captain Nate Jennings sat in her living quarters adding the final touches to her daily entry log. The cabin could not be described as spacious, but it was a reasonably comfortable retreat from the hubbub of the ship's command deck. Placing a full stop against her final

remarks of the day, she sat back and allowed the last few bars of her favourite Rachmaninov piece to wash over her. Her shoulder length dark brown hair hung silkily over the head-rest of her chair, framing her pretty young face. In some ways, her youth and attractiveness had worked against her. She was a brilliant and dedicated pilot who had risen through the ranks quickly and with determination. It had been the subject of much gossip amongst those jealous of her achievements. Drifting away from the screen, her bright, hazel coloured eyes wandered up towards the tiny three-dimensional image which she had hurriedly tacked onto her wall all that time ago. For a moment, that beautiful green paradise which had exerted such a bewitching influence over them all began to draw her in once again.

They had catalogued the unnamed planet 'P-Twelve'. The geo-bio analysis they had completed over the year or more that they were there had shown it to be perfect.

Nate gazed into the tiny image and watched as the warm breeze gently danced through the trees. As the forest sounds began once again to fill her head, the scent of the woodland floor flooded her nostrils and she once again felt herself being drawn into that place. The trees seemed to surround her now, dense thickets of vegetation, shimmering in the dappled sunlight filtered by the woodland canopy. As she watched, she thought she could detect a movement and she strained to peer through the thin veil of mist suspended between the trees up ahead. As she tried to focus, Nate thought that she could see someone there, a face looking intently back at her. Then, in a moment, it was gone.

Reluctantly, Nate forced her attention away from the image and, retying the knotted sash around her silk dressing gown, walked the short distance across her quarters to the bathroom. As she approached the hand basin, the mirror illuminated automatically and a soft electronic voice filled the room. "Is everything alright captain?" it inquired. The voice was quiet, irrevocably calm, asexual and yet somewhat maternal. "Uh-huh." She turned on the tap. "It's quite normal Nate, on these kinds of deep space missions. You mustn't worry." Nate hated the way the ship's computer seemed always to be in her head. Fake concern, phoney emotion - damn stupid software designers, thought Nate as she splashed the cool water over her face. She gazed into the mirror, allowing her blurry eyes to gently focus.

"Would you like some more light, Captain?" the computer asked with a perfect combination of subservience and motherly reassurance. "Thanks." Nate padded out of the bathroom and across her cabin.

For a moment, she stared again at the tiny image above her desk that had been troubling her so much lately. There was no sign of the figure she had seen lurking in the mist. Too long cooped up in this place, she though dismissively when, quite unexpectedly, she was snatched out of her reverie by a sudden flash of red in the corner of her retina. Shivering slightly she moved to the open doorway and inclined her head forward into the gloom. Nate quickly scanned the corridor for any sign of the passing crew member. She called out into the darkness. "Raban?" The name echoed briefly, reverberating along the cold steel passageway. "Raban? Is that you?" No answer. Stepping over the bulkhead into the gloom, Nate turned and looked along the sparsely lit, featureless conduit twisting away into the distance, illuminated only by isolated pools of creamy light. She paused for

a moment, turning to look in the opposite direction. “Dekker?” Nothing. She could have sworn she’d seen someone in the corridor. She turned once more and, in that moment caught another glimpse of the figure she had seen so fleetingly out of the corner of her eye, just a dart of red now, some distance off in the half light. Quickly, Nate reached inside the doorway to her quarters and picked up her communicator before heading off down the corridor.

“Status E, say again, Status E. This is Nate, living quarters, section blue. Do you read me?” The com-pac gave no answer, save for a prickly static. “I repeat, Status E. I am in pursuit of an unidentified in blue section. It may be a sleeper, I don’t know. I may require assistance. Please acknowledge. Over.” Still no answer.

Nate began to run now, the dullish lights flashing in succession over her head. Now and again she caught a glimpse of her quarry, a figure clad in bright scarlet, a flare in the midnight sky. As Nate watched, the little figure darted left into another corridor but when the captain reached the intersection, it had vanished without a trace. Her communicator broke the silence and bleeped sending out a rat-a-tat of echoes which ricocheted along the metal walkway.

“Captain,” came a deeply troubled voice through the ether, “I think you’d better come and see this ...”

From the small knot of trees, Millie watched with tears in her eyes as her father was dragged aboard the shuttle. She could hear his desperate, strangulated cries as he was pulled inside, “Millicent! Millicent!” His voice trailed off into the darkness as the hatchway slowly closed. In a moment, the air was filled with the roaring crescendo of the shuttle engines. Millie began to run as the craft lifted into the sky. Her arms outstretched, tears clouding her eyesight, she stumbled clumsily over the rough grassland. “Daddy!” she screamed, “Daddy, come back!” When finally she reached the landing site, the shuttle craft was now a tiny black dot disappearing into the blue forever. Sobbing loudly, she collapsed to the ground. But there was no-one there to hear her now. She was utterly alone.

The sight that greeted Nate as she reached the ship’s bridge was quite unlike anything she had seen before. They appeared to be moving slowly toward some kind of vast precipice, beyond which lay a blisteringly bright featureless void.

“Speed?” The captain demanded, instantly snapping back into her professional, no nonsense alter ego.

“We’re affecting a dead slow at present, Captain.”

“Well, fire all retro’s dammit! I don’t want to collide with that thing!”

“Building towards that now, Captain. We need to correct our speed first. Firing at full drive, we risk overstressing. We could damage her.” Nate had always trusted her

second in command's cautious approach but right now they were hurtling towards something unknown and utterly terrifying. She quickly considered the possibilities and gave the command.

"Fire full retros."

"But Captain, I cannot -"

"Fire full retros!" she barked.

"Mam!" The second's voice spoke obedience, but his face showed otherwise. He allowed himself a split second to look once again out of the viewport at the approaching oblivion before giving the order.

There was a terrible clamour of groaning metal, like the guttural roar of some monstrous dinosaur. The deck of the ship began to vibrate, shaking any unfixed objects to the floor. The small crew clung desperately to anything they could find to prevent themselves from being thrown off balance. The control banks began to flash wildly, readouts showing the ship's various systems careering towards danger point. The air was quickly penetrated by a deafening warning klaxon as the onboard computer calmly imparted the news of their imminent demise.

Finally, the craft was rocked by a deafening explosion, throwing them all violently to the floor. The ship ought to have been utterly destroyed but, quite inexplicably, there came an abrupt silence. It was as though the ship had passed, unexpectedly, into the eye of a terrific raging storm.

Nate gazed at the scene around her before helping the others around her to their feet. A cursory check of the instruments showed all systems appeared frozen at the danger point. As she gazed outside, Nate could see they had come to a complete standstill on the edge of that ominous white precipice.

Following the rift as it tore through the infinitesimal void of space-time was not easy. For a start, the trajectory was random which meant that the TARDIS had absolutely nothing to lock on to. To make matters worse, the speed at which the colossal fault line was travelling was increasing at an exponential rate. The blue box bobbed and careened violently, like a tiny car on an immense, nausea inducing roller-coaster, and plummeted further into the void. Stretching out before it, the inscrutable vast white canyon continued to grow like an ice fissure opened up by the hull of an Arctic sea vessel.

In the control room, the Time Lord was battling with the central console, furiously manipulating the controls in a desperate struggle to keep pace with it.

"If you would just slow down, I might be in with a chance of keeping up!" he shouted irascibly before thumping the console and refocusing on the controls. The ship dived angrily, throwing its pilot off balance. He was almost knocked to the floor but managed to steady himself and regain control. The violence of the movement sent the Police Box

barrelling away from the fault line and diving wildly into the darkness. There was nothing to do now except force an impromptu materialisation.

He stabbed at the scanner controls and studied the screen. The ship appeared to be floating quite gently on the edge of the fault line. His tired eyes examined the abyss which, even through the filter of a monitor screen, seemed to burn with an intense ferocity. As his eyes slowly adjusted, he thought he could make out something on the other side and, peering into the darkness beyond, he spotted what looked to be the hull of another, much larger, spacecraft.

"Hello ..." he muttered to himself. Zooming in still further, he thought he could detect a kind of shimmering aura around the craft and the faintest trace of a heat wave but quickly dismissed it as a distortion caused by the fault line. The scanner registered no signs of life, but there was the oddest sense of something reaching out – a distress call? No - something sentient that drew his attention and made him want to investigate. A moment later, the Police Box had materialised onboard. As he emerged, his ears were filled with the bellowing of the ship's emergency siren. Bright yellow hazard lights swept the corridor in giddy circles of confusion whilst the walkway edges pulsed with tiny red flashing bullets which chased away into the distance. He ran along the corridor, eventually reaching the packed bridge where he managed to slip in unnoticed, joining the otherwise diverted audience.

There was a general hubbub of voices as the ship's crew tried to come to terms with what they were seeing. It was a small crew, perhaps ten or twelve. The young female captain stood before the open viewport, backlit by the incongruous white mass beyond.

"Please! We have to remain calm!" Clearly rattled, she was doing her best to assert her authority.

"What the hell is that thing, Captain?" The panic in the questioner's voice just added to the tension in the room.

"I ... I don't know, Baines! Can someone switch that damn noise off?" The warning siren ceased blaring. "Thank you! Look, we have to analyse it. I've only just seen it for the first time myself." she said, her voice quavering.

"We'll have to wake a few stiffs! Get those boffins to look at it!" shouted another crew member. The other crew members echoed their approval.

"Listen! No-one is doing anything until I've had a chance to consider our position. And I'm certainly not going to risk reviving anyone until the systems are back on line! It's too dangerous." The crowd murmured uneasily, and Nate feared it might boil over at any moment. Suddenly, the air was filled with an ear-piercing screech and the entire crew turned to face the stranger who had smuggled himself onto the bridge. Half sitting on the edge of a computer bank, he appeared to be running a small sonic probe over the surface of the metal wall behind him. The peculiar interloper flicked the device off. The glowing red end had created a noticeable gouge in the metal's surface. This strange, roughly dressed, ill groomed man looked as if he might have arrived at a watering hole after trekking for several weeks through the outback, but he seemed to settle them all

with a steady, unwavering look. Embedded deep within that curious, furrowed old-young face there lurked a pair of eyes that seemed to contain all the wisdom and sorrow of an ancient soul. A bewitching sparkle flashed suddenly into them as the odd little stranger enigmatically announced:

"I know what it is ... which I think may just make me your best friend."

A lone Dalek, an obelisk of perfect obsidian, glided smoothly onto the command deck.

"Re-porrrt!"

"Time Lord craft in collision with battle cruiser. Accuracy of collision suggests Time Lord understands more than anticipated regarding Dalek war fleet. Analysis ongoing …"

There was a short pause as the data was assimilated; the only sound the continual pulsing throb of the background systems. Above the array of gleaming bronze sentries busy at their work stations, a vast screen replayed the moment of impact in slow motion. A single Dalek glided forward and spoke, now in a low, menacing cadence.

"Your strategic calculations did not predict the attack … ex-plain …"

"Attack was reckless and could not have been predicted …!"

"You have failed. You are to be ex-ter-minated!"

The entire retinue of gleaming metal monsters now turned from their work stations and began to advance as one on the single black automaton. Its eyestalk scanned the room, first left then right, trying to comprehend the wall of metal that was coming towards it. For a second, it backed away slightly before an enormous, deafening, exultant cry filled the space:

"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!!!"

And, in a single, ear splitting detonation, the creature was destroyed. Turning from the scene of destruction, the Dalek commander barked a new order:

"The stra-te-gist is to be re-plaaaced! The Time Lord must be found!"

Nate was alone in the captain's cabin with her strange visitor. Together they stared out of the hatch window at the fault line. Their faces were bathed in a stark, atonal glow which drained the natural colour from their skin, like the light from a powerful fluorescent strip-light. Nate spoke in a hushed whisper, as if worried that the thing outside might be able to hear her.

"I've never seen anything like it. Where did it come from?"

"Nate, I think, in a way, it is my fault."

The young captain gave a grim chuckle at the visitor's inadvertent joke, but was quickly brought back to reality by the seriousness of his expression. She caught another glimpse of those sorrowful blue-grey eyes, set within the creases of his time-worn face, before he withdrew from her eye line. "Your fault?" she asked lightly, walking over to a small, ornately carved cabinet and pouring them both a drink.

"I'm so sorry. I think this thing was aimed at me." She turned her head and he could see the confusion in her eyes. "Nate, I can't explain but, far away from here, in another time and place, there is a battle raging. I never chose to be caught up in this thing but, now that I am, I cannot separate myself from it. It has become part of me … no, worse … it's become who I am." Abruptly, his tone changed, drifting off in thought as he took the glass in his hands. His words seemed no longer to be directed towards her but to himself. "They must have used the Destiny device ..."

As his words trailed off into an empty silence, the two of them sat perfectly still, gazing across the cabin. This was the first moment of stillness he had experienced since arriving on board and now, without the distracting effect of all that had been happening around him, he could feel a much stronger sense of that force that had brought him here. Not a voice or a distress call, something more rudimentary - the confusion and fear of a child lost in a strange wilderness. Dispelling the thought, he turned to look at the tiny three-dimensional image of the forest on the wall above Nate's desk. After a few moments, he resumed his fragmented explanation.

"You see, I destroyed one of their ships, a huge battle cruiser. I ... it wasn't a calculated move Nate, it was done in anger. I ... ," He faltered for a moment, ashamed, suddenly realising the hitherto unseen consequences. "I'm not proud of what I did, Nate. And now, I have caused all this." A light switched on in Nate's head as she now grasped what this stranger, this man she had decided so quickly to trust, was saying. "These are the realities of war: Anger, retaliation, escalation. And in the crossfire, innocent bystanders are killed."

Nate sat quietly, allowing his words to permeate her thoughts. The implications seemed too profound; she was trying to hold smoke between her fingers. After a few moments she gave up trying and, with an enforced brightness, changed the subject to something she considered more tangible. "I've just realised, we are sat here talking and I don't even know your name."

"Ah …" There was that little twinkle in the stranger's eyes that she had seen on the bridge, something almost charmingly attractive. In a moment she was aware of this man somehow being all ages at once. But it was quickly replaced by a gradual sinking into the murky depths of some wide unfathomable ocean. "I was wondering when we might get around to that. I used to have a name, once, but it's a bit like a best suit. I've put it away in the corner of a locked cupboard somewhere. I suppose I'll just have to be content with these old rags ..." His voice trailed away and the thought was gone, sinking far too deep below the reach of anyone, swallowed in the profundity of an impenetrable darkness.

After a few moments, he continued. "Nate, things do not look good for you or your

crew. You all seem perfectly normal but, before I came aboard, I detected no life signs from your ship." He could see the confusion in her hazel coloured eyes. As much as he wanted to spare her this, he could not.

"This thing that you are trapped in - it is a tear in the fabric of space and time and it is causing all manner of temporal disturbances. I have to find a way of closing it. Left unchecked it will continue to expand."

He thought suddenly of the child-like fear that had somehow drawn him here.

"Nate, when I first saw your ship, I felt something - I don't know what exactly - an anxiety, the panic of a child, lost and abandoned."

"The girl."

"You've seen something, Nate? Something you couldn't explain?"

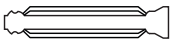
A single tear ran down over her cheek. She explained about the little red clothed figure she had seen, running through the ship's labyrinthine interior. As she described what she had seen, there was a clear note of relief in her voice. Now, at last, she had found someone she could confide in, to talk about her imaginings without the fear of judgement. But her relief was short lived.

"Nate, listen. I'm not sure if we will be able to escape from this. The fault line out there is a terrible threat!" She locked on to his face, hanging on his every word. This situation was beyond anything she had been trained to deal with. He could very well have asked her to leap out of the nearest airlock and she would have obeyed.

"Do you understand, Nate?"

As he gazed into her face, he thought he could see the workings of her mind as it slowly processed the information. After a long pause, the answer she gave was not quite what he expected.

"It's not that simple."



The ship's engines were fissioning out of control. Frozen in time, however improbably, the vast engine room resembled some kind of three-dimensional hologram. The scorching atmosphere had been filled with clouds of thick radioactive fug which now hung in the air, ominous and still. Cloaked within were myriad static fragments of metallic debris, a sea of tiny insect corpses bound in the silken threads of a multitude of brooding spiders. Dekker stared out through the visor of his Kevlar suit, open mouthed, at the scene before him. Spewing out of the open engine ports into deep space hung a superheated radioactive cloud. Beyond stretched the fault line, a blistering void forever growing, threatening to engulf the comparatively tiny vessel.

He turned to gaze back across the still-frame explosion occupying the centre of the hangar. Beads of perspiration ran down his forehead, stinging his eyes. As he moved slowly back through the sweltering furnace, his attention remained fixed, enthralled by the

moment he was exploring; its strangeness, its terrible intensity. Each jagged fragment of that reactor, blown apart but somehow pinned by a moment in space and time, suspended in that incandescent, rarefied atmosphere through which he was now walking. This then was the moment of their annihilation, of the end of it all; the moment of his death. He felt a nauseating whoosh of adrenaline course through his body. His legs became shaky and uncontrollable as he stumbled clumsily towards the engine room doors like a newly born calf. He had to get out of there: Now.

As they reached the ship's cold, dark hold, their ears were assaulted by a torrent of appalling, tortured screams. The captain and her curious companion began running now through the semi-darkness, their echoing footsteps mingling with the ghastly sounds. As they journeyed further into the darkness, the screams seemed to ring out and reverberate all around them, making it difficult to find their source. As his eyes slowly grew accustomed to the dark, the Time Lord could see that the gantry along which they were traversing was lined with caskets.

When finally they reached the origin of the awful sounds, they found three crew members gathered around another man, clothed in a simple white surplice and writhing in agony on the cold metal floor. There were a number of electrodes fed by a tangle of thin coloured wires connected to the poor unfortunate's head and chest. The screams continued, his face etched with agony and fear. As they approached, the crew members began to shout above the awful din, trying to offer some explanation. Nate started forward, pushing the men to one side. Rushing to the prostrate man, the Time Lord tried desperately to comfort him before scooping up the control panel from which the wires trailed. Feverishly, he jabbed at the controls before removing the sonic screwdriver from his jacket and quickly disabling it. The man's back arched savagely, as if he had been violently electrocuted, before the body slumped quietly to the floor. The visitor gently placed a hand on his lifeless face and closed his terror-stricken eyes.

A moment later, in a whip-crack change of temperament, the craggy faced stranger had jumped to his feet and, throwing the electronic device to the floor, leaped threateningly towards the tiny, shocked audience. Quickly, the members of the crew ran off into the darkness. Nate rushed to her companion's side and tried to calm him. In a few moments, his anger had subsided and he was suddenly, acutely aware of his own moral uncertainty.

"They were just frightened," Nate offered and she quietly removed her jacket, laying it over the dead man's body. "I warned them not to attempt revivification without the systems on line!"

"Nate, what is all this?" This time it was his turn to ask the questions. She crossed the gantry and from the darkness pulled out a large crate on which she sat. Her companion remained motionless, staring mournfully at the shape before them. Still he could sense the mounting fear and confusion growing all around him. The entire ship was awash with it, seeping from every circuit, every nut and bolt. It's the ship, he thought quietly; the ship is terrified! Wrapped in thought, he stood bathed in the creamy wash of light from above, his

face riven with a pall of ghoulish shadows.

"Tell me your name first." she chastised him, unexpectedly.

"Nate, I - " The sound hung in air, like the final note of a symphony. She could see he was not about to give in.

"We were on a mission, perhaps the most important mission in the history of our colony. You see, we are living on borrowed time. Our natural resources can no longer support us: energy, raw materials, food, water … Our manufacturing plants struggle to provide enough to sustain us, despite working constantly day and night. Our atmosphere is now so polluted that the air recycling plants cannot cope. And so it goes on. Our children are dying. We live in the perpetual gloom and stench of an environment totally overcome with pollution."

"So, your only hope of survival was to look for a new home."

"Four years ago, we set off on an exploratory mission to find a new planet to colonise. We are a small crew but we carry a very valuable cargo."

"Your whole colony packed into this hold?"

"No, we couldn't risk that. We carry almost a thousand of the colony's most prominent academics, specialists in geology, cosmology, ecology, geophysicists, agronomists …"

"Yes, yes, I see." He was starting to understand at last. "But this hold is much bigger than that surely? We must have passed hundreds of caskets alone!"

"Specialists and their families!" The explanation hit the Time Lord fully like a punch to the stomach. "It was part of the experiment and also thought to be good for the learning of our people. That's why they designed and built the coma ships."

"Coma ships?"

"Here. Look." She led the way to a small readout screen embedded in a nearby gantry bulkhead and tapped briefly at the keyboard. The screen flickered to life, sending an eddy of neon reflections across their faces, a picture of a brightly coloured diamond which rotated on its axis a number of times before fading into black. After a moment the short history film began. The entire story of the colony was reduced to a brief sequence of sound bites; the Earth's final holocaust, the race to establish a new colony, the desperate struggle for survival and prosperity, the battle and eventual steady decline towards inevitable toxic disaster; a postcard encapsulating the struggle of an entire civilisation. There was, however, a message of hope. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence came the possibility of grand interstellar exploration. It had long since been known how to suspend bodily functions and induce artificial stasis but the problem of long term cryonics - whilst simultaneously crossing the vastness of deep space - had been considerably more problematic.

"I wonder how they fixed that problem?" the old man said.

"Just watch," Nate replied, and turned her attention back to the screen.

The breakthrough had come in the development of a new type of interstellar craft,

one that could transport hundreds of people in stasis safely under the governance of a central, sentient computer system. This hardware 'core' could not only monitor and regulate the environmental systems of the ship but also capitalise on the knowledge and instincts of those held within its confines. Each ship could therefore become an inordinately complex, truly sentient, gestalt system. The result was an immense leap forward in bio-mechanics, enabling Mankind to venture out into the farthest reaches of space.

As the presentation finished, Nate turned to her companion.

"This ship was the first of the fleet. When we left, they were still completing the project. Our biggest priority was to find a new home, but there was resistance to the idea of cryonic travel. They needed to make a political point, to assuage public opinion. The press had branded the vessels, 'coma ships'. So they instructed the scientific survey team to bring their families along. We were to demonstrate that our people could survive and flourish beyond the stars." There was a note of fatal irony in her voice.

"Are there … children aboard?"

Nate avoided his question, her expression suddenly turning much darker. "As I said, it's not that simple."

They both stared once again at the lifeless body on the floor. After a time he said simply, "I need a moment, Nate," then turned away and vanished into the darkness. Lifting her weight off of the storage crate, Nate walked over to the body and checked the label on the empty casket, whispering the name out loud: "Technician, Frank Collins." Moving a little further on, she found a second empty casket but, before she could check the name, she caught a movement out of the corner of her eye. Turning back towards the body, she saw the image of a girl; the girl she was by now quite familiar with. She was standing over him, her red jacket glowing gently in the soft light.

"Goodbye, Daddy." the little girl whispered. A second later, she was gone.

The ship hung silently on the edge of the vast expanding chasm. The fault line was growing, becoming less and less stable. The coma ship's sensors were overwhelmed, totally unable to make any sense of the vast ocean of random and conflicting data now surrounding it, an insect settled on a television screen of white noise. As the sensory net throughout the ship tried endlessly to recalculate and adapt, so the entire vessel remained locked in a kind of cerebral spasm, a turmoil of electronic thought processes echoing back and forth in endless spirals of logic and counter-logic. The environment no longer conformed to any anticipated patterns of normality. It had tried to seek answers from the sleepers - the collectors and compilers of data held in suspension deep with its hold - but even they could not offer up any useful explanation.

Since the being known as Collins had come back on board all those months ago, the core had been troubled by his profound sense of loss. The love for his daughter, the child he would never see again, had been so strong; a tidal wave of desperation that had

affected the core so deeply that it had eclipsed all else. Now, stranded in this impossible place, unable to make any sense of its surroundings, the core was nothing more than an echo of that lost child, stranded and alone.

Its thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the arrival of two newcomers into the core. As the beings stepped into the chamber, the ship quietly scanned them.

Iris, check - brain scan, check - heart beat, check: match event- Captain Natalie Jennings.

Iris, unknown - brain scan, unknown - heart beats……hypothesis - stranger…

"So, you have come at last!" the calm, androgynous voice that continually infuriated Nate had somehow changed. There was a hint of relief behind the usual electronic detachment. Feeling redundant, for all the world like a proselyte bearing some exotic offering, she looked enquiringly at her odd companion. It was as though he were the prize the ship was seeking. As the newcomer moved to the centre of the chamber, the computer hungrily linked him in. Nate watched as his expression adopted the familiar rictus she had seen with each individual attempting communion, his face upturned in telepathic union with the central core.

For the ship, it was suddenly as though the doors had been flung open on the brightest of summer days. The stranger's brain was incredible; a vast cavernous place full of extraordinary ideas and knowledge, a cathedral of beauty and inspiration and everywhere, dark unsettling corners crammed with secrets and nightmares. It sensed too that he was holding back - holding back? It had never experienced strength like this before. What more could there be inside this gigantic, unfathomable mind?

He will know everything! The relief of the core, able at last to share its terrible burden, sang through the stranger's mind. The core had been desperately holding the ship's systems at critical for what, at computational level, had seemed like an eternity; trying to hold out just long enough for someone like him to arrive.

As Nate watched, the stranger's face grew steadily greyer, beads of perspiration now running down his neck, forming tiny rivulets. Finally, the core released him and he slumped heavily to the floor. Nate quickly grabbed a wipe from a nearby dispenser and dabbed at his craggy face. When he finally came to, he offered gentle humour.

"Didn't have you down as the 'bedside manner' type." She tried an attempt at a smile.

"So?"

"Well, it's official - we're definitely aboard a canoe bound for a certain creek." She even laughed for a second.

"Nate, it all makes sense now." She took a sharp intake of breath. Did he now hold the key to everything? "The child you saw; she was left behind, wasn't she?"

Her tears began to build again. “We had no choice … we had to leave. You should have heard her father’s cries …”

“But don’t you see? You’ve been seeing her running through the corridors, lost. It was the ship, Nate! It was trying to communicate with you, tell you what her father was feeling. And now, like that little girl when you left P-Twelve, the ship is confused, stranded here … lost.”

Suddenly, everything made sense.

“I’d always seen the girl in the photograph. Until we washed up here, at the fault line. It was only then that I saw her running through the corridors. She was so frightened and alone.”

“The core’s telepathic interface has deposited the fight mission data in my head, Nate. It was just looking for the right vessel to preserve the data and get it back to the colony. We can still save them.”

She could sense he was holding back on her, something he was not telling her. Slowly, woozily, he rose to his feet. He had his back to her now, staring pointlessly at a blank space on the wall. “I wish I could do the same for you and your crew.” He let the words hang in the air for a moment. It was Nate who finally broke the awkward silence.

“How did you arrive here, on board my ship?” He knew it was coming.

“I’m a time traveller. I travel in time and space.”

She looked at him for a moment, unsure whether to believe this latest revelation.

“Then you can help us! You can get us off this ship!”

“Listen to me, Nate. I told you that I had scanned your ship and that it was showing no life signs - remember? In reality, Nate, you no longer exist. You are only here because of the fault line.”

She felt the finality of his words in the pit of her stomach.

“I saw the explosion, Nate; or, at least, the beginnings of it. I didn’t recognise it at first, but the core has helped me to understand. Your instruments are all frozen at the zenith of the ship’s destruction. The ship’s computer is holding back the final explosion but it is a fixed certainty. Once that fault line is closed, time will correct itself and … and you know what will happen, Nate.”

As she moved to walk away, he turned to face her.

“Nate, you, your crew and your passengers only exist here, caught in a split second between life and death. I wish I could save you, take you with me, but I can’t, Nate.”

Once again, she recognised the simple honest truth in the stranger’s words. She hardly knew him but she was somehow in no doubt about his sincerity.

“It was my error!” she said. “I ordered the firing of the retro rockets. The stress was too much for the ship. I condemned us all to death.”

It was what she had been trying to say for some time, she just couldn't find the words to express it. Now, with perhaps only moments left, her confession tumbled out of her, simply and starkly, like a spectre lurching out of the shadows.

"We all have our regrets, Nate. Sometimes our choices are so limited that there is no way we can win. It's a difficult lesson to learn."

"I'm scared," she said simply before her face became a mass of tears. The craggy old man crossed to her and wrapped her in his arms.

"I never thought it would end like this…"

"Hey, you're the bravest dead, or alive, captain I've ever met," he said softly, touching her delicately on the nose. After a few moments, she recovered slightly and dried her eyes.

"Walk me home?" he asked, gently. They began to walk slowly out of the chamber, Nate's head resting on her friend's shoulder. Beyond, in the corridor, Nate's faltering voice faintly echoed, "So, just what is your name?"

The answer was lost as the ship's computer slowly closed the hatchway door and returned to silence.

Nate gazed in bewilderment at the blue box standing incongruously at the corridor junction. It seemed so unassuming and yet completely at odds with its surroundings; as if it's waiting for something, like an illusionist's cabinet lurking in the off-stage darkness, awaiting its grand entrance.

"Go ahead," he said, simply, a faint sadness in his voice. He seemed to sense exactly what she wanted to do. She hesitated for a moment and then quietly, tentatively, took a step forward and placed her hand gently on its surface. Beyond the warmth of the wood, there was a slight tingling sensation, a kind of electrical static. She withdrew her hand almost immediately but, somehow, a connection remained, a soft propinquity. Silently, she turned to look at her diminutive visitor. Swathed in the obscurity of the half-light, she thought she could detect a slight smile, one mixed with the abject sadness within his eyes. In her mind, she could hear his words echoing through the cold, labyrinthine passageways of the ship: I can't take you with me … I can't take you with me …

She was wrenched violently from her thoughts as an explosion tore through the ship. As they regained their balance they could see, somewhere up ahead towards the bridge section, a terrific flash of flame. A turmoil of confused voices quickly filled the air only to be overpowered by the sickening groan of contorting metal. Quickly, the visitor rushed to a nearby airlock and gazed out through the tiny circular window. As he spoke, an air of dread now filled his voice.

"My god - they've found me."

Panicked, Nate punched desperately at the buttons on her communicator and shouted for anyone who could hear her. There was a short reply quickly truncated by

a loud crackle of static. The com-pac seemed to fizz for a moment before the dreaded hollow metallic voice from the ship beyond flooded through: “Ex-ter-min-aaaaate!” It was almost as if the communicator had become a red hot coal. The captain suddenly recoiled, dropping the device and sending it crashing to the floor. A second blast now thundered into the coma ship’s hull, this time throwing both the captain and her companion to the floor. A horribly distorted cry came over the communicator and the Time Lord scooped it up, trying desperately to answer the call. The shouts all around them now turned to terrified screams as they struggled to their feet. Straining anxiously to see through the tangled mess of twisted metal now all about them, Nate watched, rigid and powerless, as her friend tried to climb towards the bridge. Above the horrifying din, she thought she could hear him calling out for survivors. For a moment, it was as though her reality slipped a gear and everything about her was taking place in slow motion. Then, just as swiftly, the sensation passed and she knew exactly what she must do. Darting forward, she made a forcible grab for the Time Lord’s hand and, with a sudden rush of strength, pulled him towards her. Her face levelled with his, she commanded him with utter assurance:

“Go now.”

In her eyes he could sense her thoughts: This is my place, not yours. You don’t belong here. You cannot save us … but you can save yourself …

She smiled, as if to silence his unspoken objection before inclining her head forwards and kissing him gently.

A moment later, the peculiar blue box had vanished.

On the TARDIS scanner screen he could see the coma ship still under fire from the Dalek battle craft as it teetered perilously on the edge of the fault line. Swamped by the much larger mass of Nate’s ship, the TARDIS appeared, for now at least, to have gone unnoticed. He gazed for a moment at the coma ship which lay helpless, under constant barrage from the enemy war craft. Working feverishly at the console, he began punching in the complex algorithms that would hopefully enable him to close the rift. It was a terrifically complicated process but, if successful, he hoped to release a neutrino wave that would change the polarity of the opposing edges of the fault line, the resultant attraction forcing the chasm to close forever. At least, that was the idea. All the while, as he monitored the Dalek ship, the control room was filled with the sound of their transmissions, a clangourous litany of intense anger.

As he worked, he was haunted by the image of Nate’s face which swam into his head, filling his field of vision. He felt wretched, as though, in doing this he would consign Nate and her passengers and crew to death forever. His eyes wandered over to the scanner screen. As he pondered the tangled mess of metal that the embattled ship had become, he kept hearing her voice in his mind, repeating over and over again, “I condemned us all to death …” Tears welled in his eyes. He heard himself telling her, all so damn authoritatively, “Sometimes there is no way we can win.”

Abruptly, his thoughts were interrupted by a new command coming through on the monitor. Bellowing out above the general clamour, it was decidedly more triumphant and vitriolic than the rest:

"TIME LORD CRAFT DE-TEC-TEEEEED!"

In a second, he reached towards the single, simple button on the console and jabbed it firmly. Beyond the confines of the TARDIS, an invisible beam of energy began its journey across the void, piercing into the heart of the burning white chasm and starting the colossal chain reaction.

Still the tirade of war cries came bleeding across the vacuum of space as the huge Dalek battle craft altered position and began to advance on the TARDIS.

"Re-focusing Destiny Device. Range and inclination plotted. Time Lord's ship is to be o-blit-er-ateeed!"

As the Time Lord stared at the control console, he knew there was nowhere to go. Leaving now would interrupt the neutrino cycle and he could not risk that. He watched intently as the console readout continued its worryingly slow countdown to zero … 26, 25, 24, 23 …

"We're not going to make it, old girl," he uttered mournfully.

The moment was broken by a crackle of static from his coat pocket and he suddenly realised he still had Nate's communicator. Fumbling slightly, he fished the device out. A voice, distorted but familiar, formed through the sea of white noise.

"Hello?"

It was Nate!

"Nate, is that you?"

"Listen. This is it - no time to talk." The communicator fizzed and crackled. She was breaking up. "… almost destroyed … time left …"

"Nate, you're breaking up. The signal is too weak."

Fizz. Crackle. "… systems on line … safe distance ..."

"Nate - I repeat. You're breaking up. Please say again!" His voice was now becoming desperate as he gazed at the advancing leviathan on the scanner. Suddenly, miraculously, the signal seemed to clear and he could hear her voice.

"I'm in the core. I have managed to get part of the systems back on line but it won't last for long. The ship is breaking up. You need to get a safe distance away."

"Listen Nate, the Dalek warship is moving in. There isn't much time. The fault line is closing, dragging you in."

"I know. We cannot escape our destiny, my friend. But there is one thing I can do. I'm instructing the core now. This is it - our final goodbye. Just please do one thing for me?"

His eyes were brimming now with tears.

“Anything, Nate.”

“Make sure this all counts for something …” The communicator fizzed again with static. “Get the mission data back to our people? Goodbye my friend - “

There was a final burst of white noise and she was gone. As he watched the scanner screen, his face wet with tears, he saw a flash of energy pulse from Nate’s ship and a vast cloud of neon which seemed to grip the Dalek war craft. As the coma ship slipped silently into the boiling white inferno of the fault line, the warship was dragged backwards with it, powerless to escape the coma ship’s tractor beam. The airwaves were filled with hollow metallic cries of anger, growing ever more faint as they echoed out across the void, until both ships finally disappeared, spirited away by the rays of an intense sun.

As the console countdown edged its way to zero, the fault line finally crackled out of existence, leaving nothing now but a silent intractable darkness.

He stood for long time, simply staring into space. He felt crushed by the weight of it all. In the end, she had accepted her fate, her role in all of this, without fuss, without argument. It was not a role she would willingly have accepted, had she known its ultimate outcome but, nevertheless, when needed, she was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice because she knew that was how it had to be. He contemplated this for some time, before finally entering the new coordinates. It was time to fulfil a promise.

The gently flowing stream danced with a myriad sparkling diamonds in the early morning sunshine. Her water buckets now filled, the old woman climbed carefully over the gentle rocky slopes that formed the shallow banks towards the tiny cottage nestled in the trees. The fully laden pales seemed to grow heavier with each short expedition. It seemed, with each season that passed, her arthritic hands struggled to hold the woven handles firmly.

She stopped for a moment to catch her breath. Placing the buckets on the ground, she slowly straightened herself to full height, her hands grasping her aching lower back. Allowing herself a moment to recover, she turned her deeply lined, sun-worn face toward her garden and surveyed her little creation. The track wound its way up through her allotment where she grew everything to sustain her: Fruits and berries, beans, self-cultivated brassicas, root crops and squashes, even exotic varieties of salad leaves. With regular watering, everything seemed to thrive here; the concentration of sunlight saw to that. It had taken many years of experimentation, however, to cultivate edible crops - on occasions it had proven to be rather dangerous - but somehow, through a determination to survive, she had made it this far.

Lifting the water pails once more, she continued along the uneven flint track. The already warm morning air was filled with the fragrance of pungent wild flowers and the humming of insects. She stopped again for a moment beneath a blossoming tree and

gazed up into its canopy. The soft breeze whispered through its leaves, casting her face with a kaleidoscope of dappled sunlight. This, she thought, was the life that she had always meant to live. This was the place that had always called to her in her dreams. In this beautiful place, Millicent had found true and utter peace. Now and again she would recall her so very distant childhood, the grey world that she had come from, her birthday when her father had explained to her about the great adventure on which they were embarking. If only he knew, she thought! She recalled watching them leave, her immediate feeling of terror as the ship darted away into the brilliance of that iridescent, azure sky. Her tears, her loss, knowing she would never see him again. She imagined his heartache at the loss of his daughter. So many times she had tried to imagine that, just maybe, coming to the end of his life, that he might be able to forgive her.

Finally, she reached her tiny cottage, the home that had been her life's work. The little dwelling had changed much over the years. As Millie had grown - weathering each and every minor set-back - so too had the home she'd created evolved. She had patched and refined it at every turn and so it had become a testament to her existence, her dogged determination. Here, then, Millie had found her paradise and realised her dream.

She used the makeshift scoop she had crafted to ladle out some of the water onto the seedlings she had potted up. Growing food, she knew, was a constant challenge of rotation, of thinking ahead to the next 'season'. This place of course had no seasons. The constant temperate climate, governed by the endless circling of the twin suns and the enviable position of this planet, made the environment uniquely abundant. Task completed, she carefully collected a small woven basket and moved further down the patch. Gingerly working her way along the frame of beans, she reached the spot where she had finished picking some days previously. Here, the fine, delicate strands of creeper bore an abundance of riches; long, pale green fingers of sweet tasting produce ready for harvesting. She picked several handfuls until her attention was drawn to the emerging weeds sprouting hungrily from the rich soil below.

"Those will have to go." she spoke softly to herself, stiffly getting down onto her hands and knees to begin the job of extracting the unwanted visitors from the ground. The sunlight was growing stronger now but a gentle breeze made the temperature pleasant. As the sun beat down on the back of her neck, she remembered her father once more warning her not to stay out too long during the hottest period of the day. Just a moment or two longer, Millicent, she thought to herself.

At that moment, she felt a subtle drop in temperature and the ground where she was working was momentarily darkened by a soft shadow. Awkwardly, the old lady rose to her feet, a little sliver of green, the last of the uprooted intruders, still held in her timeworn fingers. Another shadow, larger than the first, cast a dim shroud which passed over her entire garden before scaling the front elevation of her cottage. Millie found herself holding her breath for a moment trying to comprehend what could have been happening. Trembling and confused she turned to look down the valley, towards the brook before, eventually tilting her head up towards the sky. There, dotted across the cloudless infinity of blue, hung a mass of ominous, grey ships. As she looked, Millie could see more and

more of the awful spectres arriving, blotting out the sky and casting a hideous pall over the entire land.

No, she cried in her head before finally screaming out loud: “NO!”

Guerre

by Alan P. Jack and Declan May

Corridors... Would he ever escape from endless blasted corridors? This one, brightly lit and sparse, nothing to make it special or interesting. He ran to the end, turned a corner.

The TARDIS.

But the door was ajar. He knew he had locked it. He was sure.

"EXTERMINATE!".

Daleks.

No time to think, then. He rushed through the door.

Would he ever defeat them? The War that lasted an eternity... This incarnation had grown old fighting it. Tired of the fight. Tired of the relentlessness of the slaughter. Tired of what the War was doing to him. Tired of the horrors that awaited him each and every time he closed his eyes. Most of all, he was tired to death of the death.

Rushing into the console room, pulling the door-

Pain!

A blast of Dalek fire. His hand was burning

Door shut. Could've been worse. This body's job was not yet done. Much more to do..

He held onto the TARDIS console. The pain gripped him so, running through him like a toxin, accentuated by every bump and jolt in the time vortex. His hand throbbed. He felt the TARDIS shudder as if in sympathy and then…

Stillness.

He didn't check the instruments. He didn't turn on the scanner. He stumbled his way across the console room and out the doors into darkness.

Straw under foot. The smell of cattle nearby. Dust.

He shut the TARDIS doors behind him but could not summon enough energy to lock the door and consciousness began to slip from him.

The last thing he was aware of was the sound of a wind muted by snow as he fell onto the soft straw. And something gliding past him…

He slowly became aware of a hand gently stroking his face, the strong smell of carbolic soap and the ravages of hard work and dishwashing on the hands. Also a coarseness about them – stirring in him a long supressed memory from childhood - belying that they had worked the land and toiled hard. There was a wiry strength to these hands, but they were not the hands of an old person. Much work but there was a tenderness too... Hands that had cared for people in the past.

But these hands were cold.

He opened his eyes. Long black, flowing hair. Sallow skin and startling blue eyes under dark, heavy lids. Brown dress... Simple white cotton blouse. Caring smile that had known pain.

“Don’t try to move. You’re quite safe.” The woman’s voice was soothing. “What is your name, Monsieur?”

“I am ...” he began, weighing up the possibilities. “Smith. John Smith”

“You are English then? From the front?” she said. “The front is far from here. Many kilometres walk! You must have been traveling for quite some time?”

She began to bind his hand. He winced.

“Longer than you could possibly imagine.” he replied.

“Where were you fighting?”

“Far away...” he began. By her accent, he could tell she was from northern France. The borderlands with Belgium. By the rhythm and structure of the language used, he identified the cadences of early twentieth-century speech. Pre-radio. Certainly within the Third French Republic. But he couldn’t, of course, be precise on the date. She had mentioned the ‘Front’. And English involvement. He was sure that whenever this was, it was within the bloody period they called ‘The Great War’. Yet, best err on the side of caution.

“I was… separated from my platoon.” He said, finally.

“*Tiens*, drink this.” she said.

She held a cup to his lips. The water was cold and soothing. No taste of chlorine or sulphur. Fresh and natural. Melted snow. (*Winter*, then…) He must have, he realised, been unconscious for some time. The symptoms of post-blackout dehydration were all too familiar to him. He drank thirstily.

"Thank you Madame..?" he said, his voice stronger now

"Corrine " she said. "You can call me Corrine."

"Enchanted, Corrine. You may, of course, call me John."

He sat up and took in his surroundings. A barn. Small and functional. Outside, through a crack in the barn doors he could see the snow falling. He wondered how far he was from his TARDIS…

"You speak an excellent French, Monsi – *John*." she said. "Without any accent whatsoever. For an Englishman it is rare."

"Thank you Corrine." He replied. "I was fortunate to have had an excellent teacher in my youth. And, before the War I spent many happy times in France. Travelling, mostly…"

"Alas," Corrine said. "I have not been fortunate enough to travel. I would have liked to but …"

She broke off. The sadness and regret in her voice was palpable.

"This is a barn, Corrine," said the Time Lord. "Presumably part of a farmstead. Do you live here alone?"

"Now I do. I looked after Maman until she died last year."

"Last year," he said carefully. "Nineteen…"

"Nineteen sixteen" said Colette. "And there was my brother. He went away to fight. I have had no word from Vincent for six weeks now."

The Time Lord thought of all those from whom he had not heard of for such a very long time. Those he knew were dead. Those who were missing. Those who were prisoners or who had run far, far away…

"I'm sorry" he said. "It must be very hard."

Corrine sighed. "With Maman it was a relief. She suffered so. Especially at the end. But with Vincent… He went off to fight just after Maman passed. He was so brave, so courageous. And he wrote to many times each week, even in the most horrible circumstances. That is, until six weeks ago."

Corrine got up. Straightened. Brushed the strands of hay from her dress. Her eyes brim-full of tears.

The Time Lord attempted to stand. His legs were weak. His hand, wrapped in a bandage, throbbed. He stretched…

"When you found me." He said. "Where was I?"

"In one of the outhouses" Corrine replied. "It was dark. There is no light in that place. I heard a noise and went out. I nearly tripped over you. I managed to pull you out of there. Though, because I could not see, I was not sure if I was dragging a dead or living man. I was able to bring you across to here. To the barn. I would have taken you into the

house, but there are steps and, I regret, I am not strong enough to lift you."

"That is quite alright, Corrine," he replied. *The room was dark. She hasn't seen the TARDIS…* "I am very grateful to you that you did what you have done."

"Come," she said. "We will go to the house now, John. I will make you some soup."

"That would be delicious." He replied. "Thank you."

The walked out into the small courtyard. Everything was covered in snow. Feet made a satisfying crunch as they walked across towards a small cottage.

The Time Lord looked down at the ground. Leading to the door of the cottage were footprints in the settled snow. What was curious was that they seemed to be prints left by large boots…

"Hello Corrine"

In the kitchen of the small house, a thin, pale man sat at the end of a long hand-made oak table. He was in uniform, his face was bruised and his ear was covered in yellowish field-dressing.

"Vincent!" Corrine exclaimed and ran over to embrace her brother. "Vincent. You are alive! Why did you not write to me?"

He looked exhausted and in need of a good bath. His sister had her arms wrapped around his neck yet, the Time Lord noticed, Vincent looked totally unmoved by the reunion.

"Who is this?" he said. His voice flat, staring at the interloper.

"This is John Smith," said Corrine. "He is English. I found him in the old out-house."

"Your sister bandaged me up," he added. "She found me unconscious and, I must say, has looked after me rather well. You must, of course, be Vincent."

"English?" he said. Then, turning to Corrine. "A *deserter*, Corrine! You let a filthy deserter into our home?"

Corrine looked shocked, as if the thought hadn't occurred to her.

"I can assure you sir," the Time Lord said. "That I am no deserter. I have simply become separated from –"

"TRAITOR!" screamed Vincent. "Lying, cowardly British traitor!"

"Vincent…" said Corrine. "You too are injured. Let me attend to your wounds."

"Yes, well." said the Time Lord,and began to move towards the door. "I shall take this as my cue to leave. Thank you so much for your kindness, Corrine. I am glad your brother is returned."

He turned to leave.

"Of course!" sneered Vincent. "Running back to your TARDIS, Doctor…"

The Time Lord stopped in the doorway. Froze.

"Corrine," he said, turning round, his voice quiet, steady and low. "I would ask you to move away from that man. Move away now. He is not your brother."

Corrine stepped back. She looked from the Time Lord to Vincent. Her back up against the wall and her face a mask of deep confusion, she said:

"I do not understand, John. Vincent, I…"

She stopped as Vincent's head twitched and then fell. His face lifted again as if it were being pulled up on strings like a puppet. His eyes were blank.

The skin of his forehead started bulging. Something was breaking through it.

"Corrine…" the Time Lord said carefully. "Get out. Now!"

But she was transfixed.

Then she covered her mouth to stifle a scream as a black mechanical eye burst through her brother's head.

"Run!" yelled the Time Lord and Corrine, screaming, with tears of fear and incomprehension running down her face, moved away from Vincent.

But not fast enough.

Within milliseconds:

Vincent – or whatever Vincent had become – raised his hand, palm-up like a gesture of surrender …

A metal gun burst through the skin...

A Dalek blaster…

"Exterminate" said Vincent, voice flat and cold and a cruel blast of fierce energy hit Corrine, making her body light up and her bones show through.

A primal sickening scream and she fell to the ground, every organ in her body scrambled and churned, twisted and burned, shattered and splintered and shifted.

Dead.

Vincent looked at his sisters lifeless body. The Time Lord regarded him, lip curled in hatred. No, this creature was no longer Vincent. A Dalek puppet, a zombie.

"You stowed away in my TARDIS," he said. "An Infiltration Flice, a mini drone carrying Dalek nano-pods. That part I understand. But where did you get the body from? How did your nano technology come to infect him? How did you know who he was and from where he hailed?"

"We found the host when your TARDIS landed, Doctor." The Dalek zombie said. "A

human heading towards this habitation. Returning to his sister from the human war. By harvesting his memories we found that he would be useful to our mission."

"But why not the girl? Presumably she was nearer. You could have infected her with your foul nano poison and killed me while I lay sleeping. But instead you chose him. Seems rather a clumsy and roundabout way to go about it. For the Daleks, I mean.

"It was not our mission to kill you, Doctor" the creature said. "Not this time."

"Oh come on!" he spat. "Of course it was! It *always* is. It's your prime directive."

"The Emperor has access to a Possibility Engine and has seen how the Doctor will act in a future battle that will ensure our victory." It said. Then: "Mission terminated"

The meat-puppet creature, made from the cadaver of a French soldier, suddenly froze. The mouth dropped open. From within Vincent's throat a small, black bullet-shaped object emerged and floated out.

It hung in mid-air, right in front of Vincent's face.

Then, it exploded.

A tiny blast, like a firecracker.

And, like a puppet whose strings have been cut, Vincent slumped to the table.

"I don't understand…" the Time Lord said aloud to no one. For there was no one else there.

Or was there?

There was a sickening, burbling moan coming from Vincent, face down in a pool of blood. It grew louder, then louder still, until the groan became a pain-filled moan and then an agonised wail…

Taking no chances, the Time Lord took out his sonic screwdriver and scanned Vincent.

Life signs.

Incredibly he was alive.

The Time Lord ran over to him, lifted his head. The wailing subsided.

The eyestalk had gone, but in its place a gaping, bloody hole. He looked down at the hand hanging limply by Vincent's side: a bleeding wound punched through it; a Skaro Stigmata…

Of course, the Time Lord thought, *The Dalek tech must have been quantum shifted. Faded back into the vortex after the Infiltration Flice auto-destructed.*

"Vincent?" he said, holding the soldiers head back "Vincent, can you hear me?"

The boy's eyes opened. Unfocused, bloodshot, rolling in his head. The Time Lord ran his sonic over Vincent.

"Life signs strong," he said. "And growing stronger. But this is impossible! Vincent? Vincent, can you speak?"

"The… pain…" he said. "The…pain… I am burning. I am burning…"

The Time Lord consulted the readings from the stream of information the sonic device was giving him.

"Pain centres inflamed two-hundred percent… four hundred percent…" he said. "There's something else. Something… new."

"… Please… THE PAIN… Kill me. Please. Doctor. Please…"

"The Dalek Flice has left some residual nano-tech," he murmured. "I can't read what it is but … No!"

The Time Lord staggered back. Vincent stayed upright on the chair, clutching his head in utter, impossible agony.

"…Corrine… I killed her… I… I can see it all, repeating and repeating… Corrine. Killing her again and again and again," Victor wept, his body shaking. "I can see the war… See and feel all of it…from every angle, every side. Feel every death…every murder. The Great War… the Second World War… the Third War… Europe burning … the planet torn apart …"

"This can't be possible," the Time Lord gasped. "Infected with a immersive sensory data-virus. A nano-tech Dalek memory expositator."

"… The Time War, Doctor…" Vincent continued, the words flowing out from him. "All of space and history ablaze. Doctor… THE PAIN…"

Frantically adjusting the settings on the sonic, the Time Lord rushed over to Vincent.

"I need you to concentrate, Vincent," he said. "Try and focus on one thing. One moment"

The boy's eyes were rolling in his head, blood streaking down his face from the deep wound left by the eyestalk.

"…The Time War… the Doctor… the massacre at Karn, the Battle of Infinite Regress," blood was now flowing from his ears. "I killed Corrine, my sister, THE PAIN, my sister. Corrine, I killed, THE PAIN, you killed, they killed Corrine… the Doctor… the Somme, Auschwitz, the Butcher of Brisbane… Corrine…"

"However the Daleks have modified their nano weapons, I can't find a way to block the neural emitters and stop the signal-"

"…Kill me, Doctor… never die, growing stronger, THE PAIN … kill me, Time Lord… Corrine burning before me like the fields of Bedullah…THE PAIN… "

"Your brain shouldn't be able to handle this information. It should have killed you. But whatever they've done, it's keeping you alive. Despite your injuries, despite the neuro-temporal overload you are experiencing, your life-signs are normal, all your organs functioning as they should. Your cells regener - "

The Time Lord stopped. Brow furrowed. He once again adjusted the settings on the sonic screwdriver and ran the device in a counter clockwise motion, thrice fold, over Vincent's head.

"Impossible…" he said. He took a step back. Watched as Vincent writhed on the chair, as he rocked back and forth, shaking in an agony that was beyond comprehension, (though not, in the Time Lords personal experience, beyond compare…) as, finally, after a juddering, spasm, the young Frenchman fell to the floor, lying beside the still smouldering corpse of his murdered sister.

"THE PAIN, THE PAIN…" he screamed, his mouth frothing, blood streaming from his head, his ears, his nose, his eyes. "Corrine, Corrine… the Nightmare Child, Gallipoli, Dresden, Hiroshima, the Horde Of Travesties, the Battered Bride, Moldox… THE PAIN…"

And on and on.

"A Dalek trap of such ingenuity," the Time Lord said, grimly. "Using their enemy's one battlefield advantage against them. Or, rather, against me. They adapted the nano-tech to keep you alive, keeping you in pain forever and ever. Barring accidents."

He walked over to where Vincent lay curled-up on the floor.

"Gallifreyan genetic data programmed into the matrix," he continued. "Making sure you can never die, your body regenerating and growing stronger. Left to it, an eternity of literal hell. A never-ending cycle of pain and torment and misery and memory. The misery of all knowledge, all pain, all time and space. Every war, every death, every battle playing in front your eyes. Including the bloodiest war of them all. The Time War. The Daleks were even sadistic enough to add a touch of the personal to your torment: the murder of your sister. Tailor-made, you could say."

"Kill… me… Doctor" whimpered Vincent, his body a paroxysm of tight, violent fits.

"Tailor-made to hurt me too," the Time Lord said. "Weaponising who the Doctor was and what I believed in."

"Kill. Me. Doctor."

"The only way to end it, to stop the unimaginable pain and the agony is to do something the Doctor would never do: Kill a human. Not only that, but to kill a human who begs to be killed. The Daleks have certainly done their research…"

"Doctor. *Kill* me."

The Time Lord shook his head sadly. He walked slowly over to where a blackened iron stove sat propped against the wall. He bent down, and, in a rapid movement – displaying strength, a feat of which would be impossible for a man, even a quarter his apparent age, to display - pulled the small black square iron grate from its rusty hinge and grasped it firmly. Weighing it up in his hands, he looked over at the desecrated body of Corrine lying crumpled on the cold stone of the kitchen floor, and the perverted, Dalek violated remains of her dear brother next to her.

Slowly, he walked over to where they lay, Vincent's eyes looking up suppliantly at him, his stream of ghastly report momentarily silenced.

"Kill a human." The Time Lord said, standing over Vincent. "Something the Doctor could never do."

He raised the grate high above his head, both hands clenching its sides firmly,

"The Daleks ought to update their records," he said. "I am *not* 'the Doctor'."

Across the snow blanketed fields, the little town of Arneux-sur-Orem slept. The war was far away and all the young men had gone. Those awake, however, heard the sound that came from the Widows farm. A loud repeated heavy thump: Iron on stone, dense and hard. So loud it was, so constant and angry its rhythm, those who heard it feared the war had reached here at last…

The Girl with the Purple Hair (II)

In a time of war a good question to ask is what is our greatest fear? Death and the loss of all we are, who we were, all we could have been? Or is it the uncertainty of when we will die? Being honest, we all know that we will die – we do from a very early age - but we spend our lives striving in vain to prevent it – healthy foods, exercise, bending our bodies into positions they were never designed to be in – but is all that activity as futile as Lear raging against the wind? What would happen if we had our time of death time coded into our vision, our very eyes, a countdown clock continuously tocking and ticking down the point from where we are to when we won't be? Would we still battle against it, striving to prove it wrong, rewind time for extra bonus seconds, or would we become complacent, even arrogant, indulging in all manners of excess assured that we couldn't die before that clock had reached dead stop zero? Or would we run into battle, cock-sure that a bullet couldn't kill us… right up until the point the counter blurred, spiralled downwards and we felt that projectile enter our bodies, ending our lives?

Well, for my part, I, Jenny Shirt, just became resigned to it. Because I know when and where and how I'm going to die. Foreman came one day, old and weary, his dirty, mud-caked hands shaking as he unscrewed the top from his silver hipflask. His eyes averted mine the entire time.

"Where have you been?" I asked him.

"Fighting" he replied. "The planet Nebulon. A human colony in the thirty-eighth century."

"Did you win?"

"We saved the planet, Jenny. We saved all those people. We made the Daleks slip sideways in time and we stopped the Trailblazer from being erased from existence."

"We?" I asked, for I knew he usually worked alone.

"Yes" he said, rheumy eyes flitting, his voice hurried. "We fought. Saved the planet. Preserved the temporal integrity of the Trailblazer. And then I dug the grave."

"Who did you bury?" I asked.

"A friend I've known for a very long time," he said. "And she died because of my

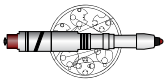
caprice. Died because I broke my own rules.

Caught in his bandolier hanging off a loop I saw a solitary long purple coloured hair. And that's how I knew. I *knew*. And the hypothetical became the actual.

"What was her name?" I asked. I kept my voice steady. I'm good at that. I've so many masks and so many layers. My poker face *is* my face.

"Names aren't important." Foreman said. "Not anymore."

We didn't go anywhere that day. I didn't want to intrude on his grief.



V. Lady Leela

Before the world of Gallifrey, before this War that tears minutes from the clock like leaves from a tree, burns huts filled with hours and days like a fire tempest; before I became, as the Doctor would say – 'civilised', I was Leela, warrior of the Sevateem.

A widow no less. A widow no more. My spouse is the War and my kin is the fight.

For I have no children of my own. A sapien and a chrono-superior may not mate with success. This was my burden and my distress. Now, these thoughts are replaced by the drums of battle and the taste of victory. My own complaints were pathethic, and a weakness. Even the death of Andred, my bethrothed, must be hidden in the red dirt until the War is won.

And won it shall be. For I have heard that the Doctor is returned.

And yet…

And yet, he is not the Doctor. They say he no longer goes by that name. They say he shuns his noble calling and is now a Warrior. They speak of this as if it was a dirty word. I have always known him to be so. I comfort myself by thinking that he learned from me.

They tried to stop me from fighting.

Lady Leela, you must go somewhere safe…

Lady Leela, this is not your fight…

Lady Leela, you must run and hide...

Lady Leela,

Lady Leela,

Lady Leela

If the Doctor has renounced his title, then I shall renounce mine. I am no Lady. And where is this 'somewhere safe'? Why is this not my fight, when it is I who lost my husband? It is I who lost my friends? No more a Lady if you prick me than the single heart that beats

in my chest. Lady no more…

The Apemen that the Daleks use are the easiest to kill. They are stupid, lumberskulled creatures who are too slow moving to be a danger. To me anyway. I have killed many of these Ogrons, and I keep their heads as trophies. My pilot, the Brevet, does not like that I do this. He does not like that I adorn the round spaces in his TARDIS console room with my trophies. But he has no choice. The Brevet was a friend of my dead husband and fought alongside him at Dark Horizon. He was with Andred when he died and is pledged to keep the promise he made to protect me.

I need no protector!

But I do need a pilot …

I am many hundred years old, yet I am still a young and strong Warrior. The magic of Gallifrey, which they call their Science, has me stay just as I was when first I arrived there. For centuries I suffered no ailments, felt no pain and my body was undamaged. I spilt no blood, and no blood was split by me.

On the fields of Bedullah, when the cowardly Daleks hid behind the clouds and used the slavemen robotic as their offensive, I lost an eye swinging a blade and blasting a staser. I killed Robomen and Ogrons and Thaleks and Brutals. When the Reapers swept in, and we thought them Skaro bloodhawks, I sliced away despite my bleeding face and the pain that gorged into my head.

I was weary.

But not for very long.

Terror can bring strength and fear can make us fight. The Battle TARDIS squadron materialised and the Kaled Sanhedrin was scorched from Bedullah. I fancy I killed a Thalek or two, but I had no Ogron skulls to add to my decorations. The Brevet was ill and scarred and scared and refused to take me further. He said his debt was done and his allegiance repaid.

But I needed his TARDIS. I needed the ship.

He would not let me, so I took it from him.

I am sorry he died, and I am sorry I killed him. But I am no Lady Leela. I am no bystander. I have a TARDIS, I can travel is space and time. I can follow the trail of the War and breaks its tracks with my cunning. I can be a Warrior I was born to be.

So Doctor: whatever name you call yourself now, I must give you thanks. I will fight for Gallifrey, fight for what is right and fight against cruelty and tyranny.

But I am no Time Lord. I am no Lady. I cannot promise there will not be blood. I

cannot swear I shall act by your rules.

But what *are* your rules, Doctor...?

Making Endings

by Nick Mellish

It is raining again. The sky is the colour of rust like always and the streets are empty save for the Sentimonocks and the rain. I've stayed low tonight in this house, finishing off a half empty bottle of red wine, its bitter edge half-making me retch, half-making me warm and calm inside. In a careless moment, I left a light on downstairs in the kitchen of my old hiding place and heard the sturdy thump and beep of a Sentimonock approaching.

I ran upstairs to a darkened bedroom, long since abandoned. I stepped over dusty toys and messy plates with stained cutlery and crouched on a bed, watching with fear as the one eye of the Sentimonock swept the room, a beam of blue light, thick and steady. It let out a klaxon, a battle cry, as it did so, a dreaded noise repeated to increase my fear:

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

The sweep stopped; I was safe.

I waited for a moment, watching its shadow bobbing up and down across the bedroom walls. Eventually, it turned away with a whirr and, eye sweeping as it belched out clumps of acrid smoke, trailed off into the light brown sky; hidden while the rain fell from its dull brown, old metal shell.

It was too dangerous to stay here now, so I gathered the few belongings I still had, picking up a barely edible apple from an old fruit bowl before I left, and with a brief gaze over my shoulder, I ran out of the house, keeping low as I darted across the empty street despite the fact there was nowhere to shelter me.

I am not a child anymore; I know that simply holding my hands over my head does not make me invisible, but it still gives me a strange sense of comfort. I reached this house, abandoned as well (of course). I pried open a door, giving it a firm tug after a few gentle moments of kindness, and winced as it flung open with a loud clatter. No sound followed save from that of the rain and the distant cymbals of thunder, so I crept inside, lighting a match to guide me through the dark. I found the sofa and ate my apple, one eye on the door, the other on a window that gave me a good view of the street. I checked my belongings again, looked at the map, and sighed at how small my progress had been so far. Before too long, I fell asleep.

In my dream, I was in what looked like a domed hall or room. There was an orchestra playing nearby, though it may have just been warming up - I'm uncertain.

I felt slightly nervous and watched as guests in tuxedos and dresses talked amongst themselves a fair distance from me. I gazed up at a long and winding staircase which led to another floor, its edges protected by a brown, wooden set of banisters. A door opened on this floor and my heart stopped beating in my chest for a moment as she appeared and began to walk down the stairs: Beauty. She was perfect, from her walk to her smile, from her face to her body. She walked over to me, slightly hurried now, and took my hand. I smiled and she did the same, kissing me on the cheek.

"Princess in blue, run with me," I said, and we took off, her hand in mine, running out of the building and down a set of concrete stairs.

Though I did not look behind me, I am certain guards were chasing us and the fear of being caught matched the sense of excitement within me, pushing me further on past other smartly dressed couples who were walking into the building.

And then I woke up, the same as always, and pulled myself into a foetal position on the sofa to try and coax myself back to sleep. It's hard though; it's always hard.

A dreamless sleep greeted me, after which, hunger woke me up. I found wine and drank it, warming my chest in the cold.

More rain today. I went to the kitchen to search for more food, grasping in the darkness of the sky. I forgot I had matches. Like an idiot, I unconsciously grabbed the length of cord controlling the lights. Too late, I realized my mistake and ran away from the room, trying to find somewhere to hide in the house, anywhere that could shelter me. In a panic, I ran upstairs and found a bedroom with corners too deep for the Sentimonocks' gaze to reach, and places to hide in.

I looked at the old and peeling posters on the walls - women from computer games with hard and pixilated edges; footballers about to score winning goals or tackle unsuspecting rivals; a calendar with plenty written in the first month and little thereafter.

I heard the thump of backfiring smoke and the whirr of travel as a Sentimonock approached. Too late to reach a corner, I dived onto the bed and pressed myself close up against a wall, peering slightly past the back of a frayed, blue curtain, hiding me from a torch of discovery but affording me enough vision to see the Sentimonock as it waited, patient as a program can be, dangerous.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

I caught my breath.

If it caught me in its gaze, that would be it for me. Like everyone else I have known, it would catch me, stun me, and either kill me or take me off to the camps where I would work until death, and even then they would probably find a job for my soul. It's hard sometimes to remember these streets and this world before they arrived; hard and unfair.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

It passed.

I blinked back the memories of life before the invasion and began my escape routine - grabbing fruit, something to keep me going; dashing across the wet street, with its scent of bonfire, looking for another place to hide; breaking in and trying to relax; falling sound asleep, exhausted by the adrenaline pumped across the day.

I found myself back in the domed room. There was no orchestra this time. The groups of couples were few, but the noise they made echoed loudly and it felt as if the room was packed.

I waited, nervously checking my watch. Suddenly, there was a commotion as she ran down the stairs, a vision in blue. Her dark brown hair swept around as she grabbed my hand and looked straight into my eyes with her own, wide like a deer's and pleading.

"Princess in blue, run!" I commanded, and we did just that, escaping from the building, fearful. I woke with a pronounced jolt and gazed out of the window, mindful that any noise I made could alert patrols.

After a few moments, I relaxed as best I could and tried to get back to sleep, but I couldn't do it. My heart still beat, hard, and my hands shook slightly. I am not a coward, but these dreams both terrify and excite me. They feel so real, to the point where I cannot readily distinguish them from everything around me. The textures I feel there, the smells that hit me, the sights that pour into my eyes and mind, all haunt me as I wake up and realize that I am back in a world that feels every bit as real as the one I have just left, but lacking in its colour, its vitality, its hope.

My hands still shook as I curled up and tried to get back to sleep, back to the dream, its strikingly tall princess and all its potential. But instead, exhaustion knocked me out and I was granted no more adventures, just an ellipsis from one day to the next.

When I woke up, I clawed my way to the kitchen and feasted on old food, polishing it off with a dust-covered bottle of wine, its smell making me tipsy before I'd even touched a drop.

I wish I'd had more. There was a moment today when my son's face flashed before my eyes. I was hiding from the probing light of a Sentimonock when he was suddenly there in my mind, a tooth missing from the front of his beautiful smile.

In this vision he is standing in the garden (my old garden, probably nothing but mud now), sunlight hovering over him and lighting up the back of his blond hair. He has a football cradled in his arms and is clearly eager to get on and play with it as I take a photograph.

Before long, he's kicking it against fences and plants, walls and the stripped bark of dying trees. This memory of old summers glowed on, pressed on my vision like dried flowers even as I closed my eyes. It was contradicted by the rain as it hit my face, and nearly forgotten as I broke open a door, almost gasping aloud as it clattered and squeaked when pulled. And yet, very swiftly, I remembered once more as I looked outside for Sentimonocks and a place to sleep cosily for the night. There are times when his face is almost too painful to recall, but I do so anyway. It keeps me going. It makes my flight from one abandoned and upset house to another, feel a little better.

I checked the map I have and winced: Sometimes, it feels like I've gone nowhere at all. I have to keep going though. I have to reach him. If only I could hear a word or two, some small cry to push me on. Instead, I've old apples, half-filled wine bottles, and glasses with the faint smudge of pink lipstick on their rims.

The hall felt smaller this dreamtime and the arrival of the princess took less time than before.

"Come with me, princess in blue."

We jumped to outside, our journey there forgotten. We were simply running down the concrete steps. Green grass stretched out around the steps, lazy rabbits squatting beneath floodlights and their dank shadows. The steps ended and, hand in hand, her breath warming the side of my face, we started down a path. I stumbled slightly but carried on running regardless, feeling her squeeze my hand for support as I did so.

Concrete buildings appeared as the darkness peeled back to reveal something more. I heard the sharp intake of my breath as I woke up, my legs cycling in the air as they attempted to keep on running.

I sat up, out of breath, and calmed myself down by going through lists in my mind: My son's favourite toys by age, places visited on my map, the countdown to the events which led to the here and now.

My son was four years old when I last saw him. For a moment, I struggled to recall how old he would be now.

Would he know me? I look so tired, a mess. I itch. I need to shave. I need to rest. I need my son.

I was just about to try and go back to sleep when something caught my eye. It was there, scratching away at the edge of my sight. I crouched down to my feet and looked at the sole of my trainer; there, its end poking out slightly, and reaching my line of vision, was

a blade of grass, attached by mud. A small blade, almost hidden by everything. I plucked it free and watched as the tiny patch of mud crumbled. I held it in my hand, squeezing it for the feel of water and life long gone, confused.

I had not been anywhere with grass or mud for a long, long time. I had avoided gardens lest I leave tracks, trails or clues. After the Sentimonocks' arrival, I only ever touched the stuff in my dreams. I had briefly grazed the nearby grass, startling a fat old rabbit and its kittens. I held the blade in my hand, frightened. Perhaps my dreams were as real as they felt after all.

I was running up a flight of stairs, Sentimonock nearby, when I bumped into him. He was standing at the top of the flight, dazed, a hand lightly scratching the back of his neck and tousling his short grey hair.

"Oh, hello," he said, smiling a little.

"I ... I ..."

I could feel my eyes growing wider and fear kicked me all over as I grabbed him by his battered coat and thrust him into a nearby bedroom. He went to talk again, idiotically confused, and I had to clamp my hand over his mouth before he said anything aloud.

His breath made my palm damp whilst he watched in wonder as the solitary eye of a Sentimonock thrust out a torch-like beam of blue light and swept the room, searching for us both.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

Its light missed the end of our feet by mere centimetres before going away, backfiring as its mechanisms groaned under the strain of flight and continual surveillance.

I recalled a time when I was afraid to walk behind cars, an aunt of mine having told me about an old school friend whose legs had been burnt by the exhaust of a car backfiring and catching them unawares. The story always comes back to me when the Sentimonocks bang in the sky, a daily, even hourly, reminder of the past.

I took my hand off the man's mouth, absently wiping it on my leg.

"Thank you," he said, clearly a bit amused by the whole situation. "I'm sorry for scaring you."

"That's okay," I managed to utter, before curiosity and surprise fled and practicality took over. "We've got to go, to leave here. Now the Sentimonocks know someone's here, they'll up their patrols and try to sniff us out. We'll have to cross the street."

"Sentimonocks?" He laughed to himself, a low chuckle. "Well, how interesting."

I gazed out of the window, looking for the distant pinpricks of dull brown patrols in

the wet sky.

"It's risky to run, with everyone out, but it's safer than staying here," I explained.

"If you say so," he said, shrugging and adjusting a tiny scarf he wore around his neck, colourful against a grey and white beard. He smiled, "Well, lead the way."

I didn't understand how he could be so calm, but I didn't want to let him know that, so I just nodded and headed on down the stairs. He followed close behind, no sense of urgency in his footsteps. I think in hindsight that it was then that I realized he didn't have a clue what was going on here.

I picked up an apple from a depressed looking fruit bowl. I squeezed an orange and, deciding it was just the right side of soft, I tossed it to him. He caught it in his left hand and smiled a thank you at me, throwing it between his two palms like a little boy with a ball.

"Okay," I whispered as we reached the front door of the house. "We need to run. When I open the door, run straight across the street, don't stop for anything. There are patrols around."

"Those ... Sentimonocks, right?" he asked.

"Right," I said, trying to not let on how much he was unnerving me now. "I think we should be able to avoid them if we're quick enough, but I'm not sure." I paused. "I'm just trying to be honest."

"It's most kind of you," he smiled, and I think he really meant it.

I smiled back, and I think I really meant that, too.

"Okay, here we go," I said, and I threw open the door.

The rain hit us hard as we crouched and ran across the street. I could see him taking everything in, looking left and right at the rows of house and spaces where cars had once been parked.

We made it to another house and I thumped open the door, angry with myself for making such a noise but more than anything, mindful that the Sentimonocks would be back at any moment. I ushered him into the house and he looked around it, turning a full circle on the spot where he had stood himself. For the first time, he looked shocked.

"I know," I said, softly shutting the door and lighting a match. "It's all so pristine. We had to flee quickly when the patrols first arrived. No-one has been back to disturb anything."

"That's not quite what I was thinking," he murmured, but went no further. I gazed into the street through a window as the rain washed away all things. After a while, I pulled myself away from the view and saw that the man had made his way to the kitchen. He rummaged through a few cupboards and found nothing, but let out a quiet, victorious chuckle all the same.

I realized I was zoning out slightly, unable to draw my eyes from the rhythmic

bounce of his eyes as they darted to and fro, drinking in his new surroundings. With a blink and the shake of my head, I dragged my sight away, focusing back to the room I was in. From my bag, I pulled out my map to inspect later and I arranged a sofa in the front room for sleeping on, pulling off a few cushions and wiping away some stray black hairs from a long-since-departed cat.

I took off my coat and chucked it over the cushions on the floor, laying on it to check its comfort and support. It was fine.

He walked back into the room, to discover me chewing my apple from the previous house and looking over the map.

"Find any food?" I asked absently, trying to make out that I was every bit as enigmatic as him.

"Mmmm? Oh, yes," he nodded. "Fruit and drink as expected in the expected places. Probably very tasty if you like that sort of thing."

"Good," I said, and waved to the sofa. "You take the sofa, I'll sleep on the floor tonight."

He frowned: "Why not use the beds upstairs?"

I opened my mouth to answer and then stopped, a horrible feeling of cold creeping through my chest as I fully processed his question: Why didn't we use them?

I didn't know, but could hear myself telling him it was too unsafe for us both to do so, but to feel free if he wanted to. He chewed it over for a few seconds, taking a small, metal tube with a red end from a belt he wore around his waist. He said that he did want to go upstairs, and left me alone on the sofa as he walked up. The question was still there, a weight on my mind, irremovable: Why not use the beds upstairs? Why not?

The orchestra warmed up but unlike before I didn't have to wait. She was standing right in front of me and it took all of my restraint not to just kiss her right there.

"Run for your life, princess in blue!" I said, holding her hand and feeling her fingers slide through mine, firmly grasping and squeezing her perfectly painted dark blue nails, which glistened with a sparkling top coat, visible in the last flecks of light from the room as we ran out of it. I felt love envelop me as we ran, pouring into my pores like cake mixture. We started down the path, but we didn't get far.

His name seems to be a loaded question. He always makes an excuse for not telling me directly, so I've been calling him Sir, which he begrudgingly tolerates. I'm not sure he likes oranges but he eats them all the same. He's stayed with me these past few days now, as we've travelled from house to house. We've made little progress, though we've not been caught, so that's something.

The first morning after we'd met, he had been taking a shower a little way on from the kitchen, the sound of hot water drowning out even the rain. I couldn't believe it. I was so angry. After all the hard work, the months, weeks and days spent being careful, he was going to alert the Sentimonocks to our presence through vanity. My son was too precious for that. I was too precious for that. I stormed over to the bathroom and knocked on its closed door, shouting at him to stop. The noise of the shower ceased and it was then that I realized how stupid I had been; in my haste to scold him for stupidity, I had turned the kitchen light on.

"Quick!" I commanded and grabbed him by the hand, steering him up a flight of stairs and to a bedroom.

He trotted obediently if not a little confused, modesty forcing him to clutch a towel wrapped around the lower half of his body, though whether it was his modesty or mine I could not say. His knees made fleeting indents upon its fluffy surface as he chased after me, a look of curiosity upon his face.

I burst open the bedroom door and stopped, a little stunned, at what was before me. A perfectly clean floor, posters fixed upon the wall where possible, otherwise neatly folded into oblongs and left on shelves. Cutlery and plates neatly stacked. No dust covered anything and the bed was freshly made, a comma of clothes stuck on the end of its duvet. It jolted me out of my focus; it felt inherently wrong somehow, but I could not tell you why. It was his turn to rescue me, pulling me to safety before a Sentimonock could catch us.

"I think this has been enough of a shock for one day," he smiled, his look of curiosity fading away.

He got dressed and, in much the same way as he had just saved me from the patrols, so he took my hand and safely led us to another house, breaking in and going through the usual protocol to make sure we were alright. All the while my mind was a fuzzy mess, inexplicably clouded. By the time I fell asleep, I could hardly remember how we'd got there.

After that day, it's been much the same as always - the fleeing, the near misses, the dreams; no more grass, but other clues, other evidence that there is something more to these episodes, something real. Scuffs on the soles of my trainers, a broken nail gained when I caught my hand on the door whilst exiting the room, the backs of my legs aching after an especially quick sprint away from danger and into nothingness.

I haven't mentioned this to him at all, though I don't know why. Something worries me.

Tonight, I was rested on a sofa when he sat down, pouring red wine into a dirty glass. He wiped onto the sleeve of his jacket a smudge of lipstick that had been left on the rim of the glass, before sipping the wine and wincing at its foul taste.

"Save some for me," I muttered and he offered me the bottle. I could see he had brought no more glasses with him so, with a wink in his direction, I drank straight from

the bottle, flirting and ignoring the same feeling I'd had with the bedroom days before: Something wasn't right; something was out of line somewhere.

Ever since that day, the rooms we had hidden in were as dejected and rotten as my stolen apples. He had slept on the floor, refusing to take the many sofas in the many houses we frequented. I'd woken up from dreams time and again to see him pretending to sleep, catching him awake, staring at me mere moments before resuming his lie.

I finished drinking the wine and went to hand him back the bottle. He waved it away and I put it down.

He looked at me, quiet, intense, and sad.

"Penny for them," I said, trying to break the thick mood.

"Not worth even that," he said, looking sadder still and smiling in a way that broke my heart. He absently bounced his feet on the tips of his toes, something I'd noticed he often did when deep in thought.

Eventually, he looked up at me and said simply: "Tell me about yourself."

I did.

I told him about my son, about the invasion of the Sentimonocks, about the swift and deathly capture of everyone I had ever loved, ever hated and ever known.

"I see," he said when I had finished. "Tell me again," he added quickly, "sorry, my mind wanders."

I frowned a little at having to think back on the horrors again, but I did all the same. I told him about my son, about the invasion of the Sentimonocks, about the swift and deathly capture of everyone I had ever loved, ever hated and ever known.

When I stopped, I noticed he was shaking his head slightly.

"Word for word," he muttered before speaking up. "That was exactly the same, word for word." He looked straight at me. "Have you ever noticed how none of this makes any sense?"

I think he was going to say more, but he caught a look in my eye and stopped himself. "This ends tonight," he intoned gravely, then fell silent.

We said goodnight soon afterwards and he turned away, lost in his thoughts, whilst I lost myself in my dream again.

This time, I kissed the princess, wanting, with every continued second, to go further. I woke up aroused and embarrassed, hoping he hadn't noticed but knowing he probably had.

When I woke up, my backbone was throbbing from an uncomfortable night spent on the sofa. I noticed that the wine was gone. An acute feeling of nausea washed over

me, and I made my way to the bathroom, rubbing my stomach as I did so in gentle circles.

I was about to enter the kitchen, when he stepped out of the shadows and took my wrist, gently but firm enough to stop me in my tracks.

"Look," he said. "Look."

I looked at my hand; it was going for the thin cord in the kitchen which operated the lights. How stupid I could be!

"Thank you," I said, "for stopping me."

"It's not your fault," he said, sitting me down. "You'll do it anyway eventually, just as you do every day."

I ignored him. "If I had turned it on, the Sentimonocks would have arrived and –"

"And nothing," he interrupted, a hint of frustration bubbling under it all. "And nothing whatsoever." He stopped and looked at me. "When I had a shower, I turned on the bathroom light. It's brighter than this one here in the kitchen. Why didn't the Sentimonocks come for us then, hmmm?"

I didn't know, so I said so.

"I do," he said. "They didn't come for me, because they only come for you. They only ever come for you, but they'll never get you." and with that, he tugged firmly on the cord and the kitchen lights sprang on.

"See?"

"You utter idiot!" I screamed and yanked the cord down, turning the lights off, my son's face flashing in my mind but as it did so, I realized that I could hear no beeps, no thumps, no whirrs, no tell-tale signs of the Sentimonocks.

"See?" he said again.

"Luck," I claimed, but something deep down told me it wasn't. The same something, no doubt, which made me pull the cord that I hadn't realized I was still holding; the same something which made me switch the lights on and unleash hell outside.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

"Run!" I screamed, and I did just that, running up a flight of stairs two at a time, the man close behind me, and hiding on a bed in a bedroom I chanced upon to the right of the stairs. He didn't join me though - he just stood in the doorway.

"Quick!" I hissed. "Quick, before they get you!"

Silent, he ignored me and walked slowly into the room, standing by the window and shielding his eyes slightly as the full blue beam of a Sentimonock caught him in its headlight.

I gasped, sick. He had betrayed me. He had betrayed my son.

I waited for his death, or worse our capture. I waited a few moments more. He remained stood upright, validated without looking victorious, facing the light with no more than a slight wince now as the machine screeched its klaxon once again.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - duh-- - DOH.

"You can join me," he said. "It's quite alright."

I didn't believe him so I stayed where I was. I didn't understand.

Eventually, the light vanished and the Sentimonock drifted away with a whirr and fug of smoke behind it.

He turned to look at me and, silent, we walked down the stairs. I didn't know what to say. We sat as we had done the night before, me on the sofa and he on the floor. So sad and fragile and small for a fleeting instance, then the same as before, one step removed from me, from all of this.

"I'm sorry," he started, "I really am."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because what I'm about to tell you is going to hurt a great deal."

I took a few seconds to prepare myself, and then asked a question I should have done to begin with."What do you know?"

He sighed."I'm a fighter. A ... a warrior." He gathered his thoughts. "There's a war going on, a war unlike anything you can imagine. More than anything you think you've ever seen. It has been my misfortune and responsibility to fight in it and try to save that which can be salvaged."

"Many weapons have been used. Many people have fallen. Many worlds have been forgotten, and then there was this world. This land. This nowhere place, which was tapped into."

"Nowhere place?" He had trailed off anyway, but I was glad to interrupt. I didn't understand a word he was saying. "Why didn't it get you? Why didn't the Sentimonock get you?"

"It is not a Sentimonock," he started. I went to interrupt, but he held up a hand to silence me. "It is a killing machine, one of the races fighting in the war; a bronze, murderous creature of hate, patrolling the skies and grounds, enslaving, ensnaring and exterminating without question. And it's not real. It's a fiction. That's what this land is: A land of pure fiction.

"I'd been here before, I knew it existed and worked. Both sides found out and tried to use it: Unlimited fighters, secure in body and narrow in thought, armed only with the knowledge that is written for them by their creators. Quite a neat idea, really. They wrote

whole armies and whole worlds in which to train them, whole scenarios and arenas for them to grow strong before they were moved from one land to the next. But it burnt. This land fell, except for a few scraps of first and second drafts such as this."

"Fiction?" my head spun.

"What did you do today?" Silence. "It's a question. Go on - what did you do today?"

"Well, I woke up," I answered. "I accidentally turned on a light, so we ran upstairs and took refuge in a bedroom whilst a Sentimonock (I used the word deliberately and slowly) swept the room with its eye, looking to capture or kill me."

"And yesterday. What did you do yesterday?"

"Yesterday? Well, I ... ." I paused, "I had a dream. I woke up from it and drank some wine and ate some food. I checked my map. I then went into the kitchen and turned on a light by mistake and I..." I swallowed, dry and dusty. "I ran upstairs and found a bedroom where I sat on a duvet cover as a Sentimonock looked for me. I then grabbed some food, left the house, found another one in the pouring rain and stayed the night there."

"And then?"

"I had a dream, woke up, drank wine, ate some food and …"

"No," he said. "No. Not right. You didn't just eat some food, you ate an apple. You always take an apple from the house over an orange."

"I like apples," I said, lamely.

"You run across the street and break into another house in the rain, because it is always raining. You wince because the door is so loud, but you never notice, do you?"

"Notice what?"

"That it's the same house. The same kitchen, the same bathroom, the same sofa, the same cat hair, the same smell of damp, the same curtains, the same bedroom of a young boy which you hide in."

"I ..."

"It's exactly the same, in every detail, down to the fruit on offer – an apple and a slightly overripe orange, the half-empty bottle of red wine, and the glass with a pink lipstick stain on its rim."

I didn't know what to say. I just knew that he was right. I had the same certainty when it came to my love the princess in blue with her dark brown hair and deer-like eyes.

"You then act out the same sequence of events to the point where you feel sick or lost if anyone breaks them. Like me, tidying a room or making you drink from a wine bottle, or your dreams with a princess." He smiled. "They're from another draft, fragments of a story - another training exercise that was never finished beyond dozens of drafts of an opening scenario. You enter it and play that role as you play this one, training always. I've watched you go there. You... fade away and then return. It's not perfect though; it leaves

paper cuts, scratches as one fiction crashes into the next: A bruise, a blade of grass on your trainers, or maybe you're out of breath, or perhaps the scent of her perfume is on your skin, lipstick on your lips. There are traces. Your character was written with enough depth to perceive them." A trace of a smile played upon his lips. "Though not enough to ask me how I got here, only to ask what my name was."

But he was wrong here, surely. Surely I would have asked him, eventually... surely?

"You don't sleep. You think you live a full day, but it's only moments. I've been here maybe an hour and you think that whole days, months, maybe even a year have passed."

"Shut up!" It comes bursting out of me now. "What are you saying?" I felt indignant, naked, angry. "What are you doing to me? I am not a toy for you to play with!"

"Yes, you are. You're a character, a warrior that never got beyond a few pages before your world was exterminated. The writers tried though. They gave you shelter, food, enemies, the opportunity for cunning, and a goal; a target to aim for: They gave you a son."

"No," I stood up, skin hot and flushed and prickling.

"You've made no progress at all. Have you ever really read your map? You just go from one house to another, back and forth across the same road, time and again. You've been living this life for decades and you've gone nowhere."

"You're lying! My... my son…"

"A background detail in a world with rusty brown skies, sheeting rain and the scent of bonfire. All very over-written, all very useless."

"Don't you dare!" I screamed. "Don't you fucking dare! Don't you dare tell me he's not real, that's he's not a real boy, that's he's not, not, not, oh god, oh god, oh god..."

"I am sorry, I really am, but that's why I am here. It's time to close this land of fiction for good, full stop."

"My ... my son ..."

And the princess in blue, time and again.

Princess in blue, run with me.

Princess in blue, run!

Come with me, princess in blue!

Run for your life, princess in blue!

Variations on a theme.

I threw up, all over the floor, apple and wine and bile. I heaved air back into my body, not easy with the damp in this house ... , in all the houses. My hands rested on my knees as I concentrated on my breath, my body trembling with all my might.

"Who am I?" I asked him.

"A character who would never survive away from this." He took my hand. "But I can write. It's time to give you an ending."

And so here I am. I am stood on the street, the rain hitting my head as it pierces through the rusty sky like drops of oil. I wonder whose words those are: A writer's, a soldier's, or mine?

He has promised to release me from this, promised an ending. I should be gone already, erased, but I live on inky sinew, blood and flesh. An idea is harder to kill than a person.

I remain, waiting now. Like I said, an idea is hard to destroy, but everything must come to an end. Everything must turn to dust.

He said that he can't promise the best written one, that he's out of touch with the niceties, but that he'll try, and that means a lot to me, though still, gut-deep, I know that this isn't fair, that I am more than brushstrokes. If he bit my neck, would he taste blood or ink and page? I want to run and run and run and find the princess, kiss her, taste her spit and lipstick and smear her mascara with tears and touch, and prove him so very wrong. I want to scream, but I daren't, just in case. It's just the way I'm written.

My limbs twinge as he starts writing, anonymous like my old author, or authors perhaps, unknown to the wider world. Just as my author was dead before, so this one will be now, by hiding himself. It feels apt, and then it feels strange, sparkles on the skin. I'm not sure if the ending he gives me will be clear. I have the feeling it will be like shining light through a prism, creating shafts of colour with meanings so varied and new that any one of us could tell of a different sight glimpsed in the mêlée.

I see those shafts for myself now and I grasp the ones I want, the sentences he writes and keeps, and even some of those he discards: A hero, much like himself, in bottle-green jacket and then yellow trousers and then bow tie askew, and then … gone. Monsters glimpsed - men of silver, devils from the sea, octopuses of steel, spiders of stature, and they go, too, and he begins anew, and me? I glow.

A knight stealing my heart; chocolate and fire; bicycles; dice; earthworms; trees; snowmen and graveyards; swimming; puddles; rough paper towels in school bathrooms; scones; dead leaves; sensitive kisses beneath my ear; music; toothpaste; newspaper print; skin; the sea; the moon and the night.

A princess in blue, loving me until the day I die, beautiful in a way I cannot fully comprehend; a way that makes me wonder why she has settled for just me. She holds me close and the feeling of her head buried into my shoulder makes me want to press her even tighter still. She smiles, the ghost of lipstick stains at the tops of her teeth, the scent of apple from the perfume on her skin, and I kiss her, exploring her with my eyes closed until the image fades to grey and another appears.

My son.

Thank you, writer. Thank you.

My son, smiling, holding out his arms, running towards me. My hands gripping his back, my tears hot and messy as I kiss his forehead and his unruly blond hair; his football close by him waiting to be kicked as the sun hits up and there are no streets, no houses, no running, no fear, and no rain. No rain at all.

And then, nothing.

The Book of Dead Time

by David Carrington

Jenny was sitting on an old park bench beside an old oak tree in Russell Square when the Time Lord ran past and trod on her foot.

"Terribly sorry," he said, not stopping, not seeing her.

"Foreman?" she said, standing up.

He stopped. Turned around. His clothes were tatty: filthy trousers with burns; a pair of sturdy boots that were beaten and scuffed; a battered leather jacket hanging from his shoulders emphasising an almost trampish, malnourished look.

He was looking at her strangely, almost as if he was having trouble recognising her. In a flash he broke the stare and recovered his manners.

"Jenny?" he said. A smallest of smiles. "Jenny Shirt! What on earth are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same question!" she said. "I happen to actually live on this planet, Foreman. And I always come here to read. Didn't I tell you that?"

His head cocked to one side, staring at her. No: staring *into* her.

"Maybe you did, yes," he said vaguely. Then his tone turned brisk and business-like. "Well. Nice to see you again. Must be off."

And before Jenny could say anything, the Time Lord jumped over the bench – displaying the springheeled vigour of a younger man - and disappeared inside the oak tree.

After a few minutes of circling the tree, looking at it properly, Jenny realised that there was no door. Obviously. A proud, ancient oak with long, low creaking arms branching out over the square but bare of leaves. Sighing, she rested her head up against it, feeling the cool bark against her forehead.

Then… she saw it. A crack running vertically up the trunk; a crack just wide enough to run a finger inside. She stared at it. It seemed to move in and out of focus. Looking at

it made her mind swirl and feel tired, her eyes blurring. She started to feel faint. It was as if something was forcing her gaze away. It was as if she was witnessing an illusion, trying to work out the contours of both the trick and the tree, and failing. It was maddening. Stretching out her hand to touch the crack, she felt a hot drip of dread and a tempest of butterflies in her belly. She sensed immense risk; it clouded her. However, she also determined that, if she wanted an answer, she would have to press on. And risk was always part of the deal with Foreman.

Persevere, Jenny Shirt…

She pressed her hand to the crack, an electric tingle running up her arm, through her shoulder and into her head, causing her head to spin dizzily. She stumbled forward then, her hand falling into the crack taking her arm with it. She felt her body pass through something that felt like warm, wildly bubbling water and then…

… she was through. She dropped to her knees. Her eyes still refused to focus, but she could see that, instead of the darkness she'd been expecting, there was a source of light coming from somewhere.

"Curiouser and curiouser" she said aloud and began to crawl forward, staring at the ground in front of her, crawling carefully. Head-first into a pair of knees. She looked up. It was Foreman. Staring down at her with a gaze that managed to be both startled and withering.

"What on earth you doing down there?"

"Crawling," she replied.

"Evidently. For goodness sake, get up!"

"I don't want to bang my head."

"You won't." He tapped Jenny on the scalp and she looked up.

They were in a sort of alcove, a wood panelled antechamber with an old-fashioned gated lift behind a brass-handled metal grille in front of them.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"The lobby of the *Acholt Bocastreon*." He said, helping Jenny to her feet. "A library inside the oak tree."

"You really are utterly ma -" she began, but the look on Foreman's face, eyebrow raised quizzically, caused her to switch track. "*Really*?"

"Really." He said.

"How do you get a library into an oak tree?"

"Oh this is just the lobby." he said. "And these doors are doors to a lift. You don't think the lift might go somewhere? Lifts usually do."

She nodded, still unsure.

"As I believe I said, I don't do this anymore but, you followed." he said "And I don't like being followed."

Was there a hint of menace in his voice?

"But," he continued. "Here you are. And it would now seem that I have little choice."

"I travelled with you last week," she said. "You didn't seem to mind it then!"

"Perhaps" Foreman nodded. "Too long ago to remember. Anyway."

He pulled across the metal grille and they stepped inside. With barely a sound, save for a soft whirring, the lift descended down, down into the ground and they were plunged into blackness.

For a moment. Then:

Bright light.

Jenny gasped as she took in the scene as the lift slowly descended.

The *Acholt* opened far and wide; a vast hangar that defied attempts to identify the end horizon. Breathtaking.

The lift came to a stop. Foreman pulled open the gate. Jenny stepped out and was suddenly salved by humid, damp air against her face. Not just a library, but also an arboretum, with lines of trees stretching out before her, bathed in light. The trees arched high above, branches latticing together to form long unbroken gantries. There were seats shaped into the wood and the branches flattened into the shape of individual books beside them. Her guide strode across the tree-lined entryway and Jenny struggled to keep up.

"This can't be possible. I mean… I know the TARDIS is bigger on the inside, but this…"

"Possible and plausible. I could explain the mechanics but we don't have much time."

"Who uses a library – a forest - like this?"

"You'd be surprised." He replied. "Most people on earth don't know it's here. But those who do have used it for millennia."

"Like who?"

"I planted the tree a few centuries before the Romans came," he said, ignoring her question "Before Londinium. And it took another few hundred years to grow enough."

"To grow an oak tree? So the library was beneath Russell Square when the Romans left?"

"Technically the square was stuck on top of the library a few centuries ago, but the city grew above it unaware. This is no ordinary oak tree."

"You don't say!"

"I acquired the acorn and planted it. A feat of incredible engineering by the Chronosmiths. The library and everything here grew from that. And, furthermore, it's still growing." He said. "Now; any questions?"

"Too many."

"Good."

"Are those really books?" she asked

"Of course they are!" he replied. "What a ridiculous question! They're grown from the trees and the texts are handwritten. The arboretum isn't a decorative affectation; it *is* the library."

"Which texts?"

"The *Acholt* holds copies of impossible texts from across the time and space. A safe and secure home for information that needs to be kept safe from the horror."

"Your war?"

He didn't acknowledge the question.

"I deliver the books, the information, and Johannes and Niamh, translate and transcribe them so they can endure forever."

"Johannes and Niamh?"

"Niamh the calligrapher and Johannes, the translator and archivist."

"Two people?" said Jenny incredulously. "That's impossible! You'd need an army to do that!"

"No armies," he replied "Not here. Two is more than enough. You'll understand when you meet them."

"Where are they then? These impossible librarians."

"Again with this word impossible!" Foreman said. "I hope I never descend into uttering it with as much abandon as you do. Impossible? Just think, if infinite monkeys with infinite time could come up with Shakespeare, then why can't a translator and calligrapher create a universal library with the aid of a Time Lord?"

"*A* Time Lord?" Jenny raised an eyebrow.

"Yes." He said, taking a silver hip-flask from his pocket and sipping thirstily from it.

"I assume you mean you, right?" said Jenny. "His Lordship the booze-swigging shabby-genteel gypsy?"

Jenny smiled at him, encouraging him to see the joke in the spirit it was intended. He gave no immediate reaction or indication that he had done so. They walked on, through a latticed leafy tunnel lined with dusty, ancient tomes. Foreman took a few more swigs and then pocketed the hip-flask

"A Time Lord isn't just what I call myself," he said finally. "It's what I am. The only title I have left."

"What about 'Foreman' then?" said Jenny.

"A name that came in handy." he replied. "'Foreman', 'Smith', 'Time Lord'. It doesn't matter. The name I used to go by, the one that suited me rather well for a time, belongs to another man. Both he and it are gone forever now."

"Well," said Jenny, smiling. "I like 'Foreman'. Rather suits you."

In that instant, Jenny saw a change come over him. A faraway look in his eyes. Sadness. "Puzzles and games, hidden mysteries," he continued. "What a reckless, irresponsible fool I was. What fun I must have had…"

He shook his head as if to clear the recollection and, to Jenny's shock, grabbed her by the shoulders. Not aggressively, but with a quiet, inner strength

"You really have no idea what's out there, Jenny," he said. "This library only hints at what a remarkable city London is, what a remarkable planet you live on. But there's more to it; to this. You can't begin to imagine it."

"Imagine *what*?"

His face darkened.

"There's not much time left," he said. "There's a book I need from Johannes. An important book. Everything rests on it. He's kept it safe for centuries, but now I need it. Reality itself is at risk unless I have it. Not just this city, this planet. Everything!"

"What book?"

"Come on," he said. "We need to find Niamh and Johannes."

"No." replied Jenny and sat on the floor, arms folded. "I'm not going a step further until you tell me what this book is and why you need it so much. Are we in danger?"

The Time Lord sighed. Stroked his beard.

"The Temporal-Necrochrononicom," the Time Lord said. "The Book of Dead Time."

It seemed as if they had been walking for hours. Down tree-lined, book-filled alleys and corridors. Up steps carved made from branches; down winding helix-like staircases carved from timber. Up, down, left, right, sideways…

And all the time talking about the Book.

"'The Book of Dead Time" he explained. "Just a simple history with names, dates, places, *people*. It's a ledger written as a narrative. History is a good story. I like it well written, with a twist if possible. And there's always usually a twist. If you know where to look."

“How do you update it?” asked Jenny. “If everything’s still happening, I mean. How can you keep up?”

“The book has everything that’s been, will be and was. And everything that was but now is no more. There was a record. I … borrowed it and brought it here. To be copied, translated, transcribed. Not long after I returned it, they destroyed it. So the Necrochronomicon is the last record.”

“They?”

“Not important.”

“But if the book knows everything, though, doesn’t that make it,” she felt stupid saying what she was about to say, “God?”

“It’s a history book. Beautifully written, admittedly, but still only paper. Don’t give it special powers.”

“That’s fair,” she looked away, blushing.

At that moment a woman with red hair emerged from under a nearby tree and smiled as they approached her.

“Aha!” Foreman said. “Jenny, this is Niamh - our talented calligrapher.”

Jenny shook the hand of a lady she guessed what roughly a decade older than her. She was pretty, with wide, bright eyes. Her hands were soft with spots of ink on her fingers. Her similarly ink-splattered t-shirt had a cupcake integrated into the design.

“You alright, Doct…”

Foremans face darkened

“Please Niamh,” he said. “Anything but that. Johannes?”

“He’s coming.”

“You should see Niamh’s work, Jenny. In fact, you can.”

A nearby branch that was growing out of a silver tree had formed, incredibly, into a desk, with pens, brushes and ink wells littering it. As with all branches here, there was a book budding out from it and its pages were open, showing a work in progress. The writing that flowed across the page appeared so flawless that Jenny initially thought it was printed, despite what Foreman had said. But,, looking closer, she noticed the faintest points of pressure that betrayed it as handwriting.

“How do you write like that?” said Jenny. “It’s beautiful!”

“At least you didn’t say, ‘impossible’ again.” said Foreman.

“Thank you Jenny,” smiled Niamh. “Years of practice is all.

“Even I don’t know how she does it,” said Foreman. “But she does.”

“Well,” Jenny said, “This book is definitely exquisitely written.”

"They all are," he said.

Niamh, clearly uneasy with the warmth of the praise coming her way, just smiled and mouthed a, "*Thank you*".

Jenny was still marvelling at the words on the page when Johannes joined them. His hair was short, blond and messy. He had a serious, furrowed face wore small round rimless glasses and – what Jenny thought – the stereotypical uniform of an academic: tweed jacket, brown trousers and a knitted tie. He stared, eyes wide and open mouthed, at Jenny.

"Jenny this is the Archivist." said Foreman. "Johannes, this is Jenny Shirt. She followed me here. The purple hair is natural, apparently. Don't look so shocked"

"Pleased to meet you…Jenny." Joahnnes stammered. "I… I'm afraid I don't often get to meet new people."

"You're drooling, Johannes." muttered Niamh.

Now," said Johannes, his tone and manner shifting abruptly, turning to Foreman. "Why are you back here?"

"The Necrochononicom."

Johannes looked blankly at him.

"They want it. I'm under orders."

"Orders?" Johannes lifted an eyebrow, evidently bemused by the idea of the man following anyone's orders.

"There's no choice. The Daleks destroyed the record" he said grimly. "It's all that is left. They'll have it or…"

"The Earth?" said Johannes. Foreman didn't respond. "But the book is hidden. Here. It's *safe*."

Foreman shook his head.

"No place is safe, Johannes," Foreman said. "I've tried very hard to protect the Earth and her timelines as much as I possibly can. But I can only keep it 'safe' from the Time Lords if *they're* not looking for it. If they've *no reason* to come looking for Earth, then they won't. There are a billion-billion planets and countless timelines out there being burnt and ravaged and desecrated by this War. It's happening all the time at *all* times."

"But they are looking for this book, right?" said Jenny. "So if they need it so much, they'll go out of their way to find it?"

Foreman sighed. Niamh and Jenny exchanged a look.

"The book may even help us win the War." he said. "The Time Lords need it and they will come looking. And where the Time Lords go, the Daleks will follow and hell will be unleashed. All I've done to protect the Earth will have been in vain. It's the book or the

Earth…"

Jenny felt her blood chill. Niamh was biting her lip anxiously.

"But what good is the book to them?" asked Johannes. "Surely the Time Lords have their own ways of predicting the future? You are 'Time' Lords after all…"

"Oh, don't be so naïve, Johannes!" Anger flashed across Foreman's weary face. "You *know* why. Intelligence. Reconnaissance. Maps in wartime - the difference between stalemate and victory. The history of the Time War before it has even finished. With that tactical advantage, victory is a certainty."

Jenny watched with growing unease. She saw a flash of the angry young warrior she had initially encountered. The old man who she had known for just as long… Well she had thought him kinder, less angry. But he was still there, simmering away: the raw, calculating strategist. The warrior.

"You'll be amazed what you notice when you're mad" Foreman continued. "And I'm mad now. The battlefield is Time and this book is Time's complete record. The perfect map. The Necrochononicom is a weapon, you've always known that. They'll end the Daleks with it. End the War."

Johannes remained impassive. The Time Lord walked up to him, standing nose to nose with the archivist.

"The book, Johannes. Now."

"No."

"It isn't your choice to make."

"It's *our* library!" said Johannes.

"It's *our* book," Niamh interjected, causing three heads to turn in her direction. "Johannes and I did it. It really isn't *yours* to take."

"Niamh, Johannes" said Foreman, plaintively . "You really have no option; it goes or the Earth burns. Everyone, *you* included, will have *never* existed."

"Without this Time War," said Niamh. "*you* would never have existed."

Ignoring her, Foreman turned back to Johannes.

"The book."

"It's not here." Niamh continued, reclaiming everyone's attention.

"Where is it?"

"It's safe."

He looked at Niamh with malevolence.

"Don't. Test. Me." said Foreman, his voice a low gravelly growl. "I will not hesitate to do everything within my power to get that book. I will not be held to ransom by…

vegetables, no matter how intelligent and 'human' they consider themselves to be!"

Jenny's eyes widened. Vegetables? What did he mean? The look on Niamh's face was one of intense hurt and shock. Johannes' lip trembled slightly, yet he remained stoic.

"You'll have to find another way of winning your war, Time Lord." said Niamh, levelly, and spat on the floor by Foreman's foot. Jenny noticed the saliva was green.

He didn't react. He simply looked from Niamh to Johannes, Johannes to Niamh, a glare so filled with distaste and betrayal that Jenny felt almost ill with unease.

"Jenny, we're going."

"Where?"

"I'm keeping you safe. Don't question me. Just do as I say."

He led Jenny by the shoulder and they started to walk away but Niamh called out after them. "Doctor!"

Foreman stopped abruptly. He turned on his heel, his eyes burning with rage. Before he could say anything, however, Niamh spoke.

"I won't call *you* anything else. You know that. Despite what you might think of us, or what you believe about us, I will always call you 'Doctor'." she said. "This, however, is for you."

Niamh proffered an envelope. Foreman snatched it from her hand, tearing it open. A sheet of old paper covered in strange circles and symbols.

"What is this?" he asked. He scanned page. He looked up. First at Niamh, then at Johannes. "A fine! *My* library is fining *me*?"

Jenny was confused. By the looks of it, Johannes was confused as well, eyes darting between Niamh, Foreman and the piece of paper in his hand.

"Well…" he said finally, clearing his throat and shifting awkwardly. "Thank you… Niamh. I shall endeavour to… pay it when next I visit."

Johannes spoke finally, his voice filled with incomprehension.

"Niamh? What is this?" he said. "A fine? But we don't fine people. We don't give books out! This is a reference li –"

"Shut up Johannes," said Niamh quickly. She kept her gaze steady on Foreman, addressing him unsmilingly. "Make sure you don't forget, Doctor."

"Indeed," he replied and, pocketing the paper and the envelope turned and walked away, striding through the library, knocking branches filled with books out of his way. By the time Jenny caught up with him they had, incredibly, reached the elevator and the way out.

In the TARDIS Jenny sat on the step that led up onto the plinth where the mushroom shaped console was. When she had last been in the ship – a week ago for her – it had looked like a library itself, albeit a rather rundown one. But gone now were the 'steampunk' touches and the wood and brass fittings, the ornate Time Lord seals and the high ceiling that opened up like a skylight to the Universe. This place was a mess, a claustrophobic utilitarian cornerless room with strange round indentations set into the wall that, despite being white and bright, cast a sickly jaundice glow over the place. With cables strewn across the floor, running from the base of the central console, and bits and pieces of strange broken instruments (weapons?) scattered over all the surfaces, this version of the TARDIS seemed more like a mechanics workshop.

Foreman was hunched over the console looking intently at the 'fine' Niamh had given him. Complete silence. He'd been doing so for the last half-hour or so. Or perhaps it was longer? Jenny found it hard to tell in this place.

"So, I'm guessing you can't afford the fine" she said, more to break the silence than out of any actual curiosity, for she had twigged that what Niamh had given him *wasn't* actually 'a fine'. "I could lend you some money if you wanted or –"

"I know where the book is." he said, finally.

"She gave you a map? Directions? Co-ordinates?"

Jenny got up from the step. Foreman's face was ashen. He looked so, so old. Jenny watched as Foreman crumpled the page into a ball. He held it tight in his fist, digging his fingers into his palm. Then, with a sorrowful, anguished cry, he flung the balled-up paper at the wall of the console room where it bounced-off one of the roundels and fell on the floor.

"Foreman?" Jenny rushed around to the side of the console where the old man was stood, his hands gripping its sides, his head hung low. She put a hand on his shoulder. "What… what is it? What's the matter?"

"They were telling the truth," he said. "The book wasn't there. The Necrochononicom. The Book Of Dead Time. When I left it with them, to translate, to transcribe … I thought they'd make a copy. But, of course, they read it."

"I don't understand," said Jenny. "How do they do that?"

"They're plants, Jenny. Intelligent plant life-forms. I rescued them. The Daleks were trying to create frontline fodder. Create a creature with a certain amount of intelligence, stick it in a Dalek casing and send it out. Easily made, easily replaceable. They went through planets, systems, whole civilisations of organic vegetation-based life forms, using them, experimenting upon them. But I stopped them. Finally. Destroyed the facilities. But in one place… just before I destroyed it I found an incubation pod with two *seedlings* in it. Infants. Still alive. Incredibly *still alive.*"

"Niamh and Johannes" said Jenny, her voice little more than a whisper.

"But they couldn't survive on their own, you see?" Foreman continued. "Taken

from the incubation pod, they were helpless. Dying. But, wherever they'd been taken from, whichever race or planet had originally been their home had, like all the others, been destroyed by the Daleks. So, after quickly studying their biology, I engineered one for them. I improvised. Using Time Lord dimensional technology, I modified the closest match I could find: an acorn. Turned it into the *Acholt Bocastreon.* And then I took them and it somewhere safe. To Earth. Away from the War. I planted the acorn – it was bigger on the inside – and them inside it. Far into Earth's history, but not so far that I couldn't keep an eye on them."

"In what would become Russell Square." said Jenny.

"Precisely. But it wasn't working. The habitat, the nursery, wasn't sustaining them. It might as well have been a tomb. But then … then I discovered something and, for a time, it was the most glorious something I had ever encountered. You see, Jenny: instead of needing water or sunlight or any of those things that make the plants grow on many a world, the only nourishment that would help them survive was *words*. Information. I fed them with all the information I had from the TARDIS databanks, from my libraries, archives. All the books and encyclopaedia and archives and databases I had to hand. And the acorn grew! It grew and grew. And the seedlings thrived. Flourished and thrived. And, what's more, they learned from it. Their consciousness's developed. Over time, the acorn grew into a tree on the outside. On the inside, the nursery became a school, became a university, and became a library. And the two seedlings became Niamh and Johannes. They were able to adapt to whichever forms they wanted, could look however they wished – they had so much knowledge and information to choose from, they could be anyone or anything – but they chose those forms. However, they could never leave their home. Never leave the library. And they would always need the nourishment of information. So, I let it be known to a few, to the trusted, to the custodians and the curators of ancient knowledge that there was a place where they could safely deposit their stories, the great and grand texts, The tales, the myths, the legends of a billion cultures. A repository of all the secret knowledge of the universe, of time and space and all the myriad realities… And, what is more, it cannot be hacked. Functioning, as they do, as a living, breathing library with paper and ink and *memory*."

In the recounting, as Jenny watched him, the old man's eyes had been dancing with the memory of the stupendous, innovation and uniqueness of the place. But now, she saw, his eyes had darkened.

"You see, when I gave them the Book Of Dead Time, it became part of the fabric of the library. Part of the organism. Part of *them*. And therefore they know everything. They know what has happened and will happen. And they know to what lengths I was prepared to go to in order to bring the book back to the Time Lords. They have always known. Ever since -"

He closed his eyes.

"Where is the book?" asked Jenny, tenderly.

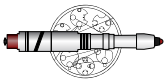
In Russell Square there used to be a mighty old oak tree. Now there is just a blackened charcoal stump. Sometimes you would see a pretty girl with purple hair sitting on the bench in front of it. No one has seen her in a long, long time.

Remember the week when millions upon millions of burnt and blackened pages, covered in the faintest of traces of strange, beautiful calligraphy fell from the skies? Remember the black leaves that covered the pavements like a layer of crow feathers? Remember the smell of burnt wood that hung in the air for months?

In Russell Square there is a bench with a plaque. Nobody knows who put it there. It just appeared one day.

It reads: *In Memory of Niamh and Johannes and Jenny Shirt.*

Remember The Book Of Dead Time? The Necrochronomicon? Remember the *Acholt Bocastreon*? Of course you don't. Why would you? How could you? For if they ever existed, they never existed at all …



Driftwood

by Simon Brett

The dark ink blue clouds reached out before Gabrielle, cotton wool hills and valleys momentarily defined by the pads of lightning shimmering across their surface. This night's lightshow was particularly vivid, and she squinted in concentration, hoping to spot a space whale, or the bulkhead of a star cruiser rising from the illuminated surface. There was a slight delay before thunder rattled the roof of the hut and set the wind chimes singing.

"How far away, papa?"

"Hard to say, little one. The time distillation from a storm that size plays havoc with the senses."

Gabrielle rolled over in her bunk, bringing the sky and her father the right way up.

"Father, Azrael told me that he predicts a cluster of at least 5 tides this month."

"Azrael says a lot of things. The nuggets of worth are few and far between. You're best sifting for facts rather than wasting time indulging his guesswork."

"He foresees the arrival of more resources, papa. He has a mind of numbers - very little in his reports seem to be born of fancy, even if he does get carried away with his stories from time to time."

"On face value, certainly, child - until the heavens drop a warship on top of us while he speaks of trinkets and dreams. All that we can do is watch the skies, keep ourselves alive from the takings in the desert and hope for a miracle. For now, that storm is going to be stirring the demon's pot at any moment - get your head down and I'll shut down for the night."

Gabrielle tilted her head, chasing the clouds as her view became obscured by the lowering partition. The sky's tone was gradually changing from blue to red and the clouds had begun to part, creating a pillar of light projecting straight down to the planet's surface. As her head gently touched the pillow and the last sliver of sky shrank to nothing, Gabrielle could have sworn she saw a small pinprick of light travelling down the centre of the column. But then it was gone and the door sealed shut and she closed her eyes.

From her early years, Gabrielle had become accustomed to sleeping through nature's varied tantrums. Her home planet had a changeable climate, and a nomadic existence

moved her family through all manner of environments. Her father, Rufus, had stayed awake through much of the night, hoping that the combination of willpower and a good stroke of his lengthy indigo beard would keep their home in one piece. When the winds finally died down, he allowed his mind to wander back to the marshland and green skies of his childhood, allowing himself just a few seconds of escapism, focusing on the day that he and his daughter would be reunited with their family and their travelling community. The alternative was to allow himself to be lost, and that was not the Shaffri way. His priority was to be the father that Gabrielle needed. Fate had plucked them from their lives on Kustavul and dropped them into hell, and no amount of self-belief could battle the loss of hope he felt. And then there were the clouds, always opening and repeating the time storm that had originally stranded them in the desert. The storms left behind remnants of distant races and civilisations, only to sweep them away again as the time tides returned.

The opportunity for supplies and the possibility of a return trip had revived his energies, and they had found shelter in this crashed spacecraft, firmly buried half way into the rock and sand of a planet of which he knew next to nothing. Further exploration on that first day into the craft had revealed a single inhabitant deep within its belly; damaged and malfunctioning - at least as far as they could tell. Here they had made their home, fashioning a hut of sorts from what was left of the upper section, and putting their mobile lifestyle on hold in favour of a measure of safety.

Gabrielle's body clock, to which Rufus often joked you could set your dials, awakened her as usual at sun up. She lowered herself from her bunk gently onto the floor and stepped carefully past her sleeping father, who sat snoring, slumped in his chair and still facing the blast doors. Gathering her garments, she made her way down a service hatch towards the lower section of the ship. Whilst the craft had obviously not been designed for humanoid use, the father and daughter had fashioned attachments to aid their movements around its innards, sometimes pulling sections of circuitry from its walls to create purchase for their clawed fingers on its smooth surfaces. Reaching the end of a crystalline tube, Gabrielle dropped to the floor of a hexagonal section of the ship which was dimly lit by fluorescent patterns to the walls. A single spherical light ignited, appearing out of the black.

"Is this daytime? My internal chronograph is no longer functioning correctly," said a metallic and distorted voice from the darkness.

"Yes, Azrael. One day I'll convince father to get you up to the surface so that you can see it for yourself. There was a cloudburst last night and a huge sandstorm early this morning."

"Understood. That would confirm why my sensors have been able to complete a surface map of the surrounding area. And thank you. My vision has been impaired for quite some relative time now. It would be pleasant to imagine the daylight, if only for a moment. I have wondered whether colours still sound like they did. It is hard to define from the limited data I receive. These days. These….hours. I fear that I may not reach the surface without further damage to my being. Have you eaten?"

"Do not concern yourself, Azrael," said Gabrielle, patiently reassuring her friend. "I

will make sure that you come to no harm, just as you have ensured our safety and survival. Can you tell me, has there been sky-fall overnight?"

"Affirmative. Head southeast and you will find a particularly large artefact. Whether it is of Eternal or Earth origin I cannot tell. I believe the hull is breached and you will be able to enter its internal structure. Find me something useful, Gabrielle. Something *glorious.* An apple. A teacup. A rock in the shape of a Nooshbat. These are things of beauty. In return, I shall continue to facilitate your survival. That is my promise. Have you eaten?"

The sands of the planet spread as far as the eye could see, dunes cascading like subtle waves on a frozen sea. A small dark figure moved across the plains, tiny against the endless, anaemic colours of crushed stone. Wrapped head to toe in a patchwork of found fabrics, goggles to the eyes and carrying a backpack, Gabrielle had healthy enough to travel its wastes on a daily basis since they had arrived. Scavenging for supplies to further aid and maintain their stay until the opportunity of escape was always a minor joy, as post-storm, ions of unknown origin hung in the air giving her a feeling of positivity and opportunity as she made her way through the planet's new features. Her perceptions were enhanced and time became immaterial - her journeys seeming to go on for days yet took no time at all, marked only by her discoveries.

She stopped to get her bearings and glanced at a compass strapped to her left wrist. Looking to the distant horizon, she was able to just make out a shimmering shape against the sky. As she focussed, light from the planet's single sun glinted from a protuberance to its peak. With its regular storms and winds, the relief of the planet changed daily, so each hunt brought a new challenge. Gabrielle had turned her imprisonment to her advantage, and much like an inmate might spend hours every day in the library, her daily discoveries would inspire great stories from Azrael. Tales of Cybermen, Krotons and Zarbi would flood from his memory banks, triggered by the presence of objects discovered amongst the debris, and he seemed to have a talent for drawing incredible uses from each of the races' unique technologies.

Eventually she reached the brow of the rise and looked across to her prize. Leaning to a slight angle, and partially covered by the sands lay a huge, impressive vessel. From previous descriptions, she believed it to be a sailing ship of ancient Earth design - though this seemed to have a shimmer to its hull, suggesting that its origins were of celestial nature. She felt a rush of adrenaline and joy. Her grandfather had told her stories of the Earth colonies, and she had coveted his small collection of Earth books back on Kustavul. Even her name was that of a character in one of those books - as was her father's before her. At first sight, there was no evidence of life. A large gaping hole to its stern suggested that all crew had perished in the storm - possibly sucked out into the...what did Azrael call it? The Vortex - that was it. The potential for survivors perplexed Gabrielle. While she longed for fresh company, the threat of danger from her father's "wrong sort" was a constant worry.

As she moved closer to the ship, the grandeur of the craft and the dramatic wound in its side became more apparent. Initially the hull seemed to be constructed from a multitude of timber sections, but as she approached the edge of the hole it became

clear that these were merely mouldings to appear as such, and the entire craft had been fashioned from one single, monstrous piece of metal. A Godlike structure, borne of vanity and a desire to emulate the traditional ships of the planet's ancient history. And yet for all of its prowess and grandeur, even the Eternals had become victims to a power beyond theirs. The side of the ship had been torn asunder like paper, bending back its sides and sucking all life from the vessel, contents spilt out into the void between space and time. It appeared that Azrael's suspicion that the travellers inside were of a breed far beyond that of normal flesh and blood was indeed true - and even they had been unable to escape the ferocity of the time winds.

As she attempted to board the ship, a raw edge caught the sleeve of her jacket, slicing it like a scalpel. The hull itself was surprisingly thin, yet on close examination it appeared to be made up of densely packed layers of razor-thin metal, painstakingly layered into a single barrier. She noticed the scrawls of the construction workers branded into each naked shard. No two names appeared to be the same. She took a deep breath, ignited her solar lamp and ventured further into the darkness.

As she reached the top of an elaborately carved spiral staircase, she became aware of a low pitched hum emanating from a nearby room. She stepped from the stairs onto the floor and immediately felt a faint vibration travelling through the gantry. She smiled to herself and followed the sound to its source at the end of the corridor. She knew the sound of a power source when she heard it. The doorway emanated a glow creating a doorway through the pitch black, further drawing Gabrielle like a moth to a flame. Finally reaching the room, she saw two rectangles of yellowish light hanging in the darkness. She lifted her light to reveal a dark blue box stood in the centre of the room. As she moved her torch to survey the area, she saw that the room itself was decorated with hand-painted murals of staggering precision. She walked around the box, looking for evidence of the object's power source, or even trinkets amongst the debris of the room. Alas, the vacuum of space appeared to have vacated the ship of all that wasn't bolted down, and this strange box was all that remained. She took a deep breath and placed a hand to its side. The long hairs stood up on the back of her claw. The vibration from within shared the frequency of that in the floor - for its size the power from within must have been immeasurable, amplified only by the Eternal ship's hull. She looked up to a glowing area to the top of the box. As she squinted at the strange shapes, they appeared to adjust to show the words "Police Box" in her own tongue - had this object come all of the way from her own planet? She found another section of writing to a centre panel, and read the words aloud to herself:

"Police telephone, free, for use of, public, advice and assistance."

"I would advise that you don't touch what you don't understand," came a second, altogether different voice, and a pink hand immediately shot out from within the box, grabbing her blue wrist with a steadfast grip. A second hand grabbed her other wrist, lifting her solar light within the visitor's eye-line. The glossy black dome with an exposed glowing solar cell lit up what Gabrielle immediately recognised as what appeared to be a human, bearded face - most likely later in life as the human ageing process had detailed in many of the books she had found.

"Where did you get this? How did you get this?" the voice now seemed more aggressive in nature.

"It was a gift."

"A gift? Who gave it to you?" The voice came louder again.

"A friend."

"Was it theirs to give?"

"Well...yes, he gave it of his person."

"Where is it now? Where is it *now*?"

Shaken at the creature's aggressive questioning, Gabrielle guessed at the geography of its body and stamped where one of its feet would most likely be. Her estimate appeared to be successful, as there was a shout of pain and both wrists were released, allowing her to fly from the room and head for the corridor. She slid down one of the staircase poles, ran for the open air and leapt the damaged shards, landing on the dunes outside the ship, and rolling to a halt at its bottom.

Not stopping to look behind her, she ran as best she could across the desert landscape, her inner sense of direction taking her in a straight line back to the homestead. Suddenly time was of the essence, and it seemed like an eternity before she reached the hut and slammed the door shut behind her.

As the door swung open, her father was sat in his usual chair, looking straight at her. A dripping cup of moss tea was in his hand, and he spilt it in surprise at her sudden entrance. To his right at the opposite end of the fireplace, in her own designated chair, was the human, cup in hand, feet up on their small table.

"Wha…..how? Don't trust him, father! What is he doing here?!"

"This kind fellow will be getting us home, Gabrielle. You've already met?"

"Not ten minutes ago…..in a wrecked ship over the rise...how…what kind of magic is this? That a man of age should move faster than a girl of youth! Has he a twin?"

"She's bright, isn't she?" said that the stranger, winking to her father.

Rufus nodded in gratitude to the man and turned to his daughter, "Well, quite frankly that's not possible, child. Our friend has been here for at least an hour. I was just about to take him to meet Azrael - if he is to come with us, we need to know that he can travel with us safely."

"He is obviously a time traveller, father," she said, giving him a stern look, "and if he has not told you that we have already met then he cannot be trusted. He is already inquisitive of the technology that Azrael has afforded us!"

Her father turned to the stranger. "Is this true? My daughter is not one for fanciful notions."

The man smiled. “It is true. I did not wish to cause you concern before your daughter returned home - and I most certainly did not want to alert “Azrael” to any fuss. If not handled correctly we may all be in immense danger, but if what you say is true and he is damaged, then we may be afforded some flexibility in rendering him inert *before* putting him out of his misery.”

“I will *not* let you shut him down!” Gabrielle said sternly, raising herself to full height. “He is our friend - we would not have been able to survive without his help!” Tears were welling up in her eyes. “You need to hear him talk. His appearance is that of a mechanoid, but his heart is true. He has given of his own body and shared his knowledge that we may thrive on this desolate planet! By your manner, I believe that all you bring is *death.*”

The visitor nodded knowingly. He drew a breath and changed his tone to reassure the girl. “I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but even in this state, he is still capable of any number of deceptive layers. At worst, I fear that your survival has merely been a construction to aid his own aims. But...we may be lucky enough to bring things to a close without a fight.”

“Never,” said Gabrielle. And in one swift movement, she flew from the room, diving down the hatch that would take her to Azrael.

She landed in a crying heap at his base.

“Do not show emotion, child,” he said. “It is not appropriate. My time is here. I am fully aware of the visitor.”

“He is human. He means you harm! He…”

“He is not human. Have you eaten?”

“Not human? Then….he is a Time Lord?”

“Affirmative. The resonance of his twin capillary system is unmistakable. My time has come. Azrael will cease, and you will be returned to your planet. All will be as it should be. I know not why but I am……glad.”

Gabrielle continued to sit on the floor, weeping. A pained whirring accompanied an extending arm from Azrael’s shell, a black amorphous cup at its end, which found its way to place itself on her head.

“Peace, Gabrielle. All will be as it should be. Everything ends - it is time for the suffering to resolve.”

The lights in the chamber suddenly became brighter, spotlights projecting directly onto what was left of Azrael’s bronze shell - the remainder decorated with all manner of substances, further elaborated with childish drawings of all manner of alien races, ships and objects.

“Move away from her...now.” The stranger’s voice had changed from the previous gentle, poetic timbre to a stern command. The voice of a soldier. “If not, I shall be forced to destroy you.”

"A Time Lord who offers a choice? The option of mercy….to a Dalek?"

"Let's not be hasty, Azrael. I cannot be sure of your motives. But please, if somehow you have any form of reason, move away from the girl."

The arm retracted into its housing, and immediately Rufus pulled Gabrielle into his arms.

The Time Lord let out a lungful of air in relief. He then proceeded to survey the scene around him. To his left, a wall of symmetrical crystalline patterning broke the light into a spectrum of colour. To his right, a rockery of plant-life stemming from all over the galaxy erupted into a multitude of colour, a hand-made trickling stream running between the specimens. To the side of Azrael, a small table bearing a near complete English tea set. He pulled up a small milking stool and sat down with a groan in direct eye-line with the Dalek.

"I see you've decorated. I quite like it, Azrael. Do you?"

"It is a reminder of my place in the universe. However, it is incomplete."

"So I see. Four saucers, three cups. I take it you weren't expecting me?"

"I have been expecting a guest, Doctor. He haunts my dreams. Though I cannot recall his name. All that I know is that he will return one day. And he will release me from this torment."

The stranger lifted himself from the stool, suddenly calm in the presence of a supposed enemy. "These dreams...the dreams of a Dalek. They are always of the same face?"

"The face...is not always the same."

"And where do you see this face?"

"I am in a building made of glass. Red skies rage outside and glorious Dalek ships pass overhead. I urge them to bomb where I stand to release me from my glass prison, but they do not. And then as they fade into the distance I am left with his face in the glass. The ghostly figure smiles at me with whichever face he chooses, and raises a cup of tea to me. In turn, I raise one to him in return. It is then that I return to standard settings."

The Time Lord sat once again. He looked down to the floor, took a breath, and said, "There is no such thing as a good Dalek. There is no reasoning with a Dalek. Their focus is such that they do not see detail - they only see the target. And yet, here we are, sat in a room with a Dalek that cherishes the details of life." The Doctor picked up a tea cup from the table. "Tell me, Azrael. What *is* this?"

"It is a tea cup" he replied.

"No, what is it really?"

"It is a cup. For tea."

"No it isn't. It is an inorganic non-metallic solid prepared by the action of heat and

subsequent cooling, formed into a receptacle suitable for the dispensing of fluid to the mouth of humanoid life-forms. A tea cup is only a tea cup to a tea drinker. To a Dalek, this is merely a side effect of inferior life-forms."

"It appears in my dreams, therefore it has relevance to my programming."

"Oh, it's relevant alright. You, my friend, are malfunctioning. My word, you even refuse to self-repair! Does Gabrielle even know that you could do so whenever you felt like it?"

"Azrael!" cried Gabrielle, "Why?"

The Doctor turned away from the Dalek and, reaching into his coat, he said, "I believe it is time to bring your suffering to an end. Luckily I hedged my bets and came prepared."

"*No!!*" said Gabrielle, breaking her silence. Her father held her fast as the Doctor's hand returned to the open air, this time holding an object which he held towards the Dalek.

The Doctor stood still, his arm outstretched towards Azrael. In his hand, the final tea cup to complete the set. And then he let it go.

The cup fell to the floor, smashing into a number of pieces.

Silence. And then the hiss of pressure as the front of Azrael's casing shifted to reveal the mutant inside. Gabrielle's eyes widened with the realisation that this was the true appearance of her friend. The creature squirmed and writhed, making a bubbling, squealing sound, high pitched and banshee-like. She placed her hands over her ears to attempt to cut out the sounds of agony emanating from the nightmare inside.

The alien within began to glow, growing brighter and brighter to the point where the three spectators had to shield their eyes.

"Step back!" shouted the stranger. "I think we'll be safer outside. I'm not actually sure what happens when a Dalek regenerates!"

The three humanoids scrabbled back up to the hut and out into the open air. Once at what he hoped would be a safe distance, the Doctor turned to look back to the hut. The ground beneath their feet shook, a rumble building to a crescendo - and the hut, ripping itself from the remainder of the Dalek shuttlecraft flew into the air, blasted by golden light emanating from the carcass beneath. It rocketed skyward, shooting over their heads and landing in a plume of sand a good half a kilometre away. Then silence.

The Time Lord fumbled at the top of his bandolier and withdrew his sonic screwdriver. He levelled it at the ship, desperately trying to get some kind of reading of activity within. His eyebrows raised and his eyes widened.

"Well *something's* alive in there" he said.

He slowly walked back towards the smoking wreckage, hand outstretched, sonic screwdriver pointing towards the mangled metal.

After a short time and the sound of banging and crashing, a hand appeared clasping a branch of wiring that lay over the side of the ship. This was followed by an arm, and then, eventually, a head of long ginger hair. The naked man rolled himself onto the sand and the stranger removed his jacket and placed it over him as he lay unconscious.

"Welcome back, Azhail. You're the only one to make it back, you know. You clever thing. And we've been looking for you an *awfully* long time."

The man's new eyes opened, squinting at the daylight.

"Is the nightmare over?"

"The chameleon experiment is over. It worked. *Too* well. You are a Time Lord, once more."

"Jolly good," he replied, "Did we win?"

"Alas. There have been no victors." The stranger looked to the ground, "Not yet. Maybe not ever."

"Ah. Well, it was worth a try," the man remained laying, a perplexed look on his new face. "Doctor, could you do something for me?"

"Well, I...I don't.....Of course, old friend."

"I could murder a cup of tea."

"It would be my pleasure. And I can imagine you could do with something to eat. New stomach and all that."

"It's been a while since I've had a stomach, to be fair. Have you eaten?"

The Girl with the Purple Hair (III)

I wish that bloody machine had been malfunctioning. I really do. Unfortunately, for once, it got us where Foreman wanted us to go. But at the wrong time.

The very worst time.

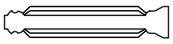
Warisia. Foreman had told me that there had once been a great battle here, one that he had been involved in. Hundreds of years ago. An endlessly repeating battle that the Time Lords had won. He didn't tell me how …

And now, the Daleks had returned. Warisia was surrounded by Kaled Dreadnoughts. In the skies above, the frayed and threadbare Warisian airforce were bravely taking on the mighty Dalek vessels, zipping between the colossal Dalek ships in their small, propeller-powered, laser-gunned *Avionettes*.

"They need my help," Foreman had said and, telling me to stay in the village, ("You'll be perfectly safe, Jenny. It's protected from Dalek attack by a Ghost Pocket". Whatever *that* meant...) he ran off towards a tall, concrete tower, leaving me alone.

The terror in the air around me was beyond palpable. The night sky, unnaturally brown as the exchange of gun fire, explosions and flying debris above, stained and distorted the evening's natural black hues.

The stars were hidden behind a literal 'fog of war' and the noise made by aerial dogfight was so loud that I didn't hear the sound of the TARDIS dematerialising…



We were in a village called Pantamotium. The Warisians were welcoming, but so, so weary. War had been part of their lives, in one form or another, forever

It was taking its toll on their humanity, even though these people were not *human* in themselves. It was also taking its toll on Foreman, they told me. A legend he was, on this planet and many others. A warrior. But they saw how it affected him. Over the years, the decades, the centuries. How it was slowly destroying him.

But, they told me, it was destroying them all. This never-ending war. It would

destroy what was left of the Universe, they said. And perhaps not even their living legend, their warrior, their saviour could prevent that. They had no single name for him. They didn't think he had one.

I, in turn, told them of Earth, of the man I had encountered many, many times over the past few months. A man of all ages, a man for all seasons. Young. Old. Clean shaven. Bearded. Haggard. Fresh. Young. Old. Young. Old. Young. Old…

The Warisians listened as I told them how he would come for me, sometimes to talk, sometimes to take me away in his machine and show me something of wonder. I told them he called himself Foreman, but I knew full well that wasn't his name.

I didn't tell them about the man I'd been seeing more and more lately: the old tramp with a limp. The derelict. They didn't need to hear that.

It was true, of course. Even the TARDIS reflected the change, every surface of the console room piled high with rubbish and – for some reason – sacks upon sacks of ancient letters and packages. And it stank of mildew, tobacco and rust.

And the look in his eyes. An expression that conveyed more loss and inner turmoil than the other versions I had encountered. Something very bad had happened to him.

I went for a walk around the village. Jerry-built huts, sheets of tin for roofs, concrete and grey and crumbling. Pantamotium was a shanty-town, a slum.

But, no matter what the surroundings, there are always children playing.

A little girl ran past me. She stopped. Stared.

"What do you use on your hair?" she asked, Even in the midst of war, her planet encircled by the Daleks, this child still possessed a child's innate and intense curiosity.

"Genetics," I said, smiling. "I'm naturally purple."

The little girl grinned, a genuine, life-affirming grin. A spark of joy in the sour bleakness of devastation. A simple smile.

But…

The Dalek that killed her then, right in front of me, would never understand a smile. We hadn't seen it, emerging from behind a ruined, ancient wall. The look of utter incomprehension on her face as the deadly beam hit her is one I shall never forget.

A smile twisted into a grotesque mask.

I dived for cover behind an iron stave. More Daleks appeared. Teleporting down from their Dreadnoughts. There was a trench under the stave, a hole to hide in.

So I hid. I cowered. I closed my eyes.

Exterminate Exterminate Exterminate Exterminate Exterminate Exterminate …

The noise. The screams. The burning.

In all, the Pantemotium massacre lasted seven minutes. 588 Warisians were killed. There was one survivor: me.

"The Daleks found a way of breaching the Ghost Pocket," Foreman said hours later, leaning up against a ruined, crumbling wall and swigging from his hipflask as we watched Warisian soldiers pile the dead bodies onto carts. "I wasn't fast enough. The Flice carrying the virus wasn't modified correctly. It should've crippled the Dreadnoughts instantaneously, and the Dalek forces with it. But I was sloppy. I got it wrong again…"

I looked at him. He was talking to himself rather than me. Trying to justify it. Find a way of living with it.

"It's not your fault," I said. "And you saved the planet."

Empty words. Empty.

"For now." he said, his eyes looking skywards. "For now."

I'm getting worried about Foreman. I haven't seen him in weeks. No young elfin faced warrior at the door, no bearded shabby-genteel gentleman calling on me in his battered blue box.

But I know I will see him again. Just once more. And I know that will be the very last time.

I, Jenny Shirt, will have one last day with the Doctor (You see, I *do* know his name now. And I know *not* to use it) and that will be the day I die.

The Ingenious Gentleman

by Alan Ronald

"In which a man striving to become worthy of a title, meets a man who no longer is."

A hot wind rustled the few bits of parched grass that grew across the vast, dusty plain. The distinctive clop of hooves on dry dirt rose against the peaceful silence. A lone figure, riding a travel-stained white horse, came to a slow stop on a sandy hill, overlooking the barren landscape. It looked like a quiet, abandoned planet.

The figure was old and thin, his face worn and wrinkled, sporting a white beard and grey hair which formed a slight wispy point atop his head. The battered, make-shift armour he wore suggested he had either seen battle, or was expecting it.

A short, round man emerged from over the hillside and came to a stop by the old man's side. He was riding on top of an underfed old donkey that was only barely able to take the portly man's weight. He had the look of long-suffering husband.

"Please Master," he began, "may we bed down soon? How long must we wander aimlessly?"

"Aimlessly?" replied the man in armour. He pointed toward the setting sun. "Behold!"

The short man looked out to where his master was indicating, squinting and shielding his eyes from the bright orange glow.

"I see nothing Master." came his confused response.

"Look harder!" ordered the old man. "Can you not see them? Giants! Six or seven of the fiends!"

The man on the donkey looked again, straining his eyes. He let out a long sigh when he realised what the old man was talking about. He chose his next words carefully.

"I must confess Master," he said tactfully. "I see no giants, but I do see windmills. And where you see arms, I see blades."

The old man paused to consider this for a moment, taking another look out toward the windmills.

“Your problem Sancho,” he said gleefully, “is that you don’t know a giant when you see one.”

Sancho took a deep breath, it was clear that this situation was not new to him.

“Master I really think-“

“Fearsome giant!” screamed the old man, his fist in the air, “Prepare thyself to feel the blade of Don Quixote de la Mancha!”

Sancho found himself pleading with nothing but a Quixote-shaped cloud of dust that had been behind in his wake.

“Windmills, Master!” he yelled after him. “They’re windmills!”

Sancho, riding atop “Dapple” (for that was the name of his faithful donkey), followed the screams. As he emerged from the dust cloud he could make out the faint shape of his master being flung from the arm of the windmill on which he had snagged himself, his body slamming into the hard ground below. He rode over to assist him, fearing the worst. Luckily Quixote was still alive, seemingly uninjured save a few cuts and bruises.

“I told you they were windmills.” said Sancho as he hunkered down by Quixote’s side.

“Poor innocent Sancho,” his master mumbled through the pain, gritting his teeth and trying to ignore it, “of course they are giants. The evil enchanter Friston has simply turned them back into windmills in order to deprive me of my victory!”

“Master, I must insist that –“

Quixote shushed him and looked around like a bird.

“Do you hear that Sancho?”

Sancho did what he always did, and indulged his master, listening closely. But this time, he was fairly certain he could, in fact, hear something, a sound the likes of which he had never before encountered, a sort of groaning, wheezing sound. It seemed to come from nearby, although he could not quite place its source.

“Giants.” Quixote revealed, pre-empting Sancho’s question. “Breathing.”

Sancho took a sharp intake of breath. Could it be? Could it be that his master was right this time? Were they, at this moment, surrounded by giants?

“Fear not dear Sancho.” said Quixote as he pulled himself to his feet and dusted off his armour. “Today is the day the evil enchanter finally pays for his acts of villainy. For I, Don Quixote de la Mancha, have discovered his carriage!”

Quixote pointed toward the open doorway of the nearest windmill; sitting just inside was a tall blue box, lit mysteriously from within.

Quixote had been pounding on the doors of the box for a full twenty minutes whilst Sancho, making full use of the downtime and the opportunity to put his feet up, was stretched out on a nearby hay bale.

"Come, foul enchanter!" Quixote screamed at the top of his lungs for the umpteenth time "Is thou too full of fear and cowardice to face me in thy true form? Step out from your infernal carriage! I will not be deterred!"

He planted a single hard thump on the door and took a few steps back, puffing his chest in anticipation, the fifth or sixth time he had done so. Much to Sancho's surprise, and slight concern, this time they heard the click of a lock being undone from inside.

Slowly, the door of the blue box creaked open, and a tired looking man with a white beard and wispy hair popped his head around the frame.

"Oh." said the stranger politely, obviously taken unawares, "I do apologise. I was miles away. Literally rather than figuratively. Down in the dungeon. I didn't hear your knocking"

He patted the door frame of his box.

This statement only served to confuse the situation further.

"Can I help you with something, perhaps?" The stranger asked, trying to move the conversation along. Sancho hopped down from the hay bale, his eyes widened to what was, presumably, their full extent.

"Master how can this be possible? Do you see?"

"Indeed Sancho. It seems the enchanter hopes to befuddle us with doppelganger magic." said Don Quixote as he straightened his back and pointed a stiff stern finger at the man.

"Friston," he began dramatically, "at long last you face me, but let it be known to you from the outset that your mirror magic will provide no respite from your just punishment." The man took another sip of tea and then casually placed the mug down before somewhere on the inside of the door. "I sense a misunderstanding." he said genially.

"Cease your prattling!" Quixote interjected, raising his lance. "And let it be said that I, Don Quixote de la Mancha, gave you one last chance to surrender yourself."

The stranger stroked his beard for a moment, followed by a sudden look of recognition. His face broke into a smile. It looked awkward on him, as though it was an expression it had not performed in quite some time and had somehow caused him pain.

"Oh this *is* wonderful." he said, hands against his cheeks in a gesture of delight. "I always wondered if you might be one of the ones that turned out to be real. Oh, I'm so pleased!"

Quixote raised a white eyebrow.

The man stepped out of the blue box with welcoming arms.

“It really is an honour to meet you. I’m something of a fan actuall-“ The man didn’t have time to finish before Don Quixote, running at full speed, tackled him around the waist, sending them both tumbling through the doors of the box and, impossibly into a large chamber with a central console.

Quixote’s armour rattled and clanged on the grated metal floor as they struggled with each other. The two of them were rolling around, cursing.

The stranger had been taken so unawares that he struggled to hold his own. Quixote, it seemed, had well and truly gained the upper hand, and he was not one to listen to reason. Concerned for his master’s safety, Sancho came running into the box and immediately stopped dead in his tracks. His jaw hung wide-open as he tried to comprehend what he was seeing.

He stepped outside, and then back again, poking his head in and out just to make sure he was definitely seeing what he thought he was seeing, completely forgetting about the two old men still wrestling on the floor.

He went back outside and walked around the back of the blue box, pressing his hand to its side and feeling the wooden panels which sent a low throb vibrating through his bones. He couldn’t stop shaking his head in disbelief.

He could still hear Quixote and the man yelling and fighting inside, although he noted that it was now oddly distant, as though they were now much further away. A sudden boom from the box made Sancho flinch, followed by another sound which he had heard before: a groaning, wheezing sound, only this time it was slightly different, garbled and strained. The light on the top of the box began to pulse, and to Sancho’s complete disbelief, the box began to fade from existence.

“Now look what you’ve done!” The man could be heard yelling from inside. Moments before it vanished altogether, Sancho quickly ran into the box, and discovered Don Quixote propped up against one of the many coral-like columns which surrounded the console, looking as though he had been clouted good and proper. The box was being buffeted around and Sancho found it difficult to stay on his feet. The man, meanwhile, was rushing around pressing buttons, pulling levers and cursing under his breath.

“Let us go evil one” cried Sancho, coming at the man with his chubby fists in the air.

“Evil one?” replied the man, still flicking switches. “A little harsh isn’t it?”

“Do not try to trick me.” Sancho gulped. “I am no fool!” I-“

Suddenly the man slammed his fist down on a precise area of the console, causing the wheezing noises to stop and the room to become still again. He breathed a sigh of relief and took out a handkerchief to wipe his brow, but not before first gently wiping the area of the console on which he had brought down his fist.

The panic rose in the now terrified Sancho, and making a split-decision, he ran for the doors.

“No!” shouted the man, “you mustn’t-“

Sancho gripped the doorframe tightly to stop himself from falling out into the void. For where there was once the inside of a windmill, there was now nothing but open space, stars and distant galaxies. Sancho dug his nails into the frame of the door, clutching on to it for dear life.

"The windmill is gone!" Sancho yelled, "The world is gone!"

"No, no," said the stranger, "It's us that have moved, now come away from there."

He slowly ushered the awe-struck Sancho back inside and closed the doors behind them.

"Try not to panic," the man said as reassuringly as he could, "you're quite safe."

"H-how can this be?" Sancho uttered, "We were...and now we are..."

"Your dear master over there knocked the dematerialisation circuits with his head, which I might add, is not how they are intended to be used. He's lucky though, could have been much worse." he said, before turning his attention to Don Quixote, slowly lifting him to his feet and giving him a quick once over.

"I think we got off on the wrong foot a bit don't you?" said the man and then made his way back toward the console.

Quixote lifted his chin up high, despite the fact it probably hurt to do so. "Sancho, I fear I have made an error in my usually impeccable judgement." he said in a dignified tone. "For this man is not Friston, of that I am sure."

"Thank goodness for that." The man muttered to himself.

"But Master, can you be certain he has not enchanted you?" Sancho whispered.

"The very thought!" The man interjected. "And it's rude to whisper."

"A good knight always observes their surroundings, Sancho." Quixote went on. "And my keen instincts tell me that this is a holy place. Can you not feel it? The lights, the sounds, the strange circular shapes adorning the walls. No, this is not the carriage of an evil enchanter, but of a noble sorcerer!"

Sancho mulled it over for a second or two.

"It does have an air of the Gods about it, I'll grant you." he said in agreement. Quixote dropped down on one knee.

The man rolled his eyes at the gesture. "Now come *on*!" He said and fiddled with more of the controls, partly as an excuse to put some distance between himself and Quixote.

"Accept my most humble apologies, Sorcerer." said Quixote with much reverence. "But my intentions were noble and true, if somewhat mistaken." The man took a deep breath, walked around the console, and stood before Don Quixote, gesturing for him to rise, which he did with only a minor amount of agony. The stranger addressed the elderly man: "Don Quixote de la Mancha, formerly Alonso Quixano, my name is… no… my name

used to be the Doctor and this," he gestured around the chamber, "is my home, it's called the TARDIS"

The Doctor and Don Quixote stood face to face in the TARDIS.

"Truth be told," said the Doctor a little bashfully. "You've always been something of a hero of mine. You changed your name when you embarked on your chivalric quest, did you not? I did the same, many, many years ago."

Quixote's eyes widened.

"You have heard of my exploits?" he asked.

The Doctor chuckled. "Oh yes. Indeed I have. And now that I think about it," he said stroking his beard. "I wonder if perhaps there's more than a bit of you in this old face? Maybe a reminder of my own past times and lives, before the war, when I was on my own noble quest.' "Your words are strange, Sorcerer." Quixote admitted. The Doctor chuckled to himself once more and turned his attention back to console, expertly manipulating the controls.

"Don Quixote de la Mancha finds my words strange," he laughed, "I really must be mad." He pulled a lever and the central column began to rise and fall, Quixote and Sancho hypnotised by it. The TARDIS doors opened and the Doctor emerged, closely followed by Quixote and Sancho.

"There we are," the Doctor said, "back where we started, no harm done. Well, not much anyway." Sancho looked back at the TARDIS.

"Excuse my ignorance," he said respectfully, "but how can it be possible? The outside, it is small while the inside remains large. Try as I might to understand, I must confess it makes my mind hurt."

"I was wondering when that might come up." said the Doctor, preparing for what seemed to be something of a rehearsed speech. "You see-"

"It really is quite straight-forward Sancho." said Quixote dismissively.

"It is?" replied Sancho.

"It is?" echoed the Doctor.

"When you observe a field of sheep from atop a hill," Quixote began to explain, "do they not look small?"

Sancho squeezed his eyes tight, picturing the scene.

"Yes..."

"And if you form a circle with your fingertips and hold it to your eye, given that the distance is great enough, could you not then fit that field, and those sheep, in their entirety, into that small gap betwixt your fingers?"

Sancho held up his hand, forming a circle and holding it to his eye, despite the fact his eyes were still closed.

"Yes! You are correct."

"From there it is simply a matter of being in possession of the relevant magical knowledge." he concluded, looking to the Doctor for confirmation.

"Isn't that right, great Enchanter?"

"Well, a few of the details might have gotten lost in the mix but you're more or less there - I must say, I'm impressed." remarked the Doctor genuinely. He spotted Rocinante and Dapple tied up at the door of the window and beamed, rushing over to stroke them. Quixote stood up perfectly straight, addressing the Doctor.

"So great Sorcerer, how is it you intend to assist me in my quest of Knight Errantry?' The Doctor seemed surprised by this question. He stroked Rocinante's mane, considering his words carefully, not wanting to disappoint Quixote.

"I'm afraid you seem to have gotten the wrong end of the stick, rather.' Quixote thought on this for a moment.

"It is a lance Sorcerer, and I can assure you I grasp it quite correctly. You see the pointed end must –"

"That's not exactly what I meant." said the Doctor, hoping Quixote got the message from the apologetic look he was giving him.

"I understand." Quixote said after a brief pause.

The Doctor nodded, "Good," he said politely.

"I am here to help *you* on *your* quest." he smiled.

"No, no, no I'm afraid that won't be necessary." said the Doctor dismissively.

"But you must be here with a purpose Sorcerer?"

"Well yes, but really, your services are not required, thanks all the same."

Even as these words were coming out of the Doctor's mouth, he began to feel regret. Turning his attention to Rocinante he could sense the crestfallen Quixote behind him, ambling over to the hay bales to join Sancho who had by this point opened a cloth sack of wine to help comprehend the events of the day.

Had he really changed that much? He was sure there was a time when the mere notion of meeting the great Don Quixote de la Mancha would have delighted him no end; the fact he was real would have filled him with joy. But now there was nothing, no sense of excitement, no sense of adventure. He wondered when he had become so numb to anything remotely whimsical, when he had become so practical, so... boring.

The Time War had taken many things from the Doctor, including his name.

But he wasn't going to let it have this.

This day belonged to him.

"I've been tracking a creature." he said spinning on his heels, as though the previous conversation had never happened.

Quixote stood to attention.

"The TARDIS should have brought me fairly close to its location, but I think a bit of footwork is probably in order from here on in." He placed his hand on Quixote's shoulder, and smiled brightly. "I'd be delighted to have the assistance of the famous Don Quixote de la Mancha and the great Sancho Panza, if you'll do me the honour?"

"Without question, Sorcerer." Quixote replied proudly.

"This creature you seek?" Sancho added with some concern. "Is it dangerous?"

"Could be." The Doctor replied as though it hadn't really occurred to him. "I'm not entirely clear on what it is, all a bit vague I'm afraid, but I'm sure we'll know it when we see it."

"You wish to slay this creature?" Quixote asked.

"Oh dear me, no." The Doctor clarified. "You see, where I'm from, up there, there is a great war being fought, and I believe this creature may have some information that will be of use."

"I understand Sorcerer." said Quixote with a nod. "We are at your service."

"Splendid." smiled The Doctor, beginning to enjoy himself a little. "Let's get this quest started then shall we?"

"I'm not sure I wish to take another journey in the magic box Sorcerer, it has made me very queasy." Sancho said concernedly.

"That's alright." The Doctor grinned. "I have a much more fun idea anyway."

Dapple was not able to travel very fast, especially with Sancho sitting on his back, but he was a tough little thing, and trailed behind Rocinante by only a few feet. For the first time in years, the Doctor felt energised. Here he was, sitting on the great Rocinante along with Don Quixote himself as they rode through the beautiful fields of the Spain countryside. He hadn't had this much fun in a very long time. Of course, he was well aware that they were no closer to finding what he came here for, but he was fairly sure that would resolve itself soon enough.

These things usually did.

He took a moment to actually appreciate the quiet solitude of the Earth. He sincerely hoped it stayed this way, at least for a little while longer.

They had only travelled a little way when the sun began to sink on the horizon. They found a circle of trees, lit a small fire and prepared to settle for the night. Sancho handed around what was left of the wine in his cloth sack before promptly falling asleep against

one of the trees.

The Doctor watched as Quixote carefully, almost ceremonially, removed his rusty, beaten armour and hung it on an overhanging branch, before performing some particularly awkward looking strains and exercises. The Doctor, not wishing to stare, turned his attention to the licking flames of the fire. He picked up Quixote's helmet, which was sitting in the grass next to him, and began turning it over in his hands, it was nothing more than a simple shaving basin. Quixote joined him by the fire.

"The Golden Helmet of Mambrino." said Quixote proudly.

"Indeed." The Doctor smiled, not wishing to contradict him.

"I will ask you not to humour me Sorcerer. You wish to tell me it is a shaving basin?"

The Doctor was visibly thrown by this statement.

"Some fool must have melted it down and turned it into such not knowing its true value." snorted Quixote. "Barbarians."

"Quite." smiled The Doctor, feeling oddly relieved.

"I am sure you know of its value, do you not?" asked Quixote.

The Doctor thought on it for a moment, recalling what he knew from the stories.

"When worn by one of a noble heart," he said thoughtfully, "it will render them invulnerable to all wounds."

Quixote smiled softly and then carefully took hold of the basin, moving to place it on the Doctor's head. The Doctor moved away, mortified.

"What are you doing?" he snapped.

"Forgive me Sorcerer, but you look to me like a man who carries many wounds, I meant only to help alleviate your torment."

The Doctor gave Quixote a grateful glance, and then turned his attention back to the flames.

"I'm afraid I am not one of a noble heart. Not anymore."

Quixote looked upon him for a time.

"The war in the sky you spoke of. You run from it?" asked Quixote.

"Once," The Doctor said solemnly, poking at the fire with a twig, 'but these things have a way of catching up with you, over time."

They sat in respectful silence, two men in tune with each other. Quixote poured a small amount of water into the helmet and then passed it into the hands of the Doctor, holding it there as he spoke, every word carefully considered.

"Courage that is not based on prudence is called recklessness, and the deeds of the reckless person can be more attributed to good luck than to bravery."

Leaving the Golden Helmet of Mambrino in the Doctor's hands, Quixote turned to sleep. The Doctor looked up at the stars and took a deep breath, doused the flames with the water and lay down for the night. For the first time in many years, sleep came quickly.

The heat of the morning sun gently woke the Doctor and he lay there in the dry grass for a few moments, feeling its warmth on his cheek. However, the brief moment of serenity was broken by a raised voice somewhere nearby.

Reluctantly, the Doctor turned himself over then strained himself to his feet. It was little moments like these which, recently, he had noticed occurring more frequently, the moments which served to remind him that his current incarnation was no spring chicken. The familiar aches and pains were catching up with him, although different bodies produced their own unique niggles. But, as with every other body he had aged with, he chose to ignore them. "What else is there to do?" he thought to himself.

The voice, he quickly realised, belonged to Don Quixote, who was some distance away across the field, sitting atop Rocinante and addressing a dozen or so men who were strung together by their necks in an iron chain.

At the head of them was a serious looking man on horseback, obviously the guard who had been escorting them, as evidenced by his garments which looked very official and intimidating. The Doctor could see Quixote pacing down the line of prisoners, speaking to each of them in turn. He was unable to hear what Quixote was saying to the men, but he imagined it probably wasn't going to end well, judging by the outraged look on the guard's face.

Sancho was still sound asleep at the foot of a tree, having drank a little bit too much of his wine rations the night before. The Doctor nudged him firmly but gently with the tip of his boot. As Sancho's eyes opened, The Doctor made sure to quickly put his finger to his lips and gesture with his head to where Don Quixote and the prisoners stood in the field.

The look of long-suffering concern that fell upon Sancho's face was telling of the long friendship he had shared with Don Quixote. Sancho immediately got to his feet and began making his way over to the group, pulling his trousers up around his waist as he went.

The Doctor followed behind, albeit at a slightly gentler pace.

If there was one thing he had learned in his travels across time and space, it was never to run at speed into trouble, and instead to try always to approach it with a considered saunter.

By his own admission it was a technique which yielded mixed results.

"I have conversed with each of these men, on your behalf Sorcerer," announced Quixote as The Doctor approached, "and not one of them has heard word of any creature. Nor have they seen anything that could be considered unusual."

“It rather looks to me as though they have their own problems.” The Doctor replied. He flashed an apologetic nod to the visibly irritated guard. It looked as though he may have had more than enough of Quixote’s meddling.

The Doctor sidled over to Quixote and looked up at it him sitting on Rocinante, gesturing for him to come close and converse with him. Quixote leant in.

“If none of them are our monster, then I think it might be wise to let them be on their way.” The Doctor said diplomatically.

“Agreed Sorcerer, but we must not be too hasty,” replied Quixote, “although there are no real monsters among these men, we must learn the nature of their individual crimes and reason whether or not freedom should be granted to them.”

“That’s not quite what I meant,” the Doctor said concernedly, “and I can’t imagine he will be too happy about it.” he continued, indicating the guard who was now seething atop his horse.

“But of course,” Quixote smiled. He tapped his nose at the Doctor, before adding, “I shall raise it with him presently.”

Sancho looked to the Doctor, clearly hoping for him to intervene in the situation. But all the Doctor could do was shrug helplessly.

“My good man,” Quixote began, in an official tone as he came parallel with the guard’s horse. “My name is Don Quixote d-“

Suddenly, Rocinante reared violently up into the air, throwing Quixote on to the hard ground below, a small cloud of dust kicking up around him. Sancho ran and grabbed her reins in an attempt to stop her from bolting whilst the Doctor ran to check on the fallen Quixote. He was yelling and screaming.

“Foul beast! What manner of creature are you!”

“What is it, what do you see?” asked the Doctor urgently.

“It is like something from the darkest oceans!”

The Doctor glanced up at the guard who was looking even angrier, a look of resentment on his face.

“Describe it to me.” The Doctor said to Quixote, as calmly as possible. “Tell me exactly what you see.”

“A vision!” Quixote exclaimed, “A fearful vision, red with sunken eyes and the teeth of an animal.”

The Doctor stood up immediately, producing his sonic screwdriver from his belt and pointing it at the guard who, oddly, did not flinch, but instead held the Doctor’s gaze with a piercing hateful stare.

After only a split-second the Doctor had what he needed, clicked off the screwdriver, slipped it back into its place on his belt, and looked up at the guard with authority.

"I think it's probably time to drop the disguise. Don't you?"

"You will regret this, *Doctor*, I will make c-certain of it." snarled the guard, his voice becoming slowly more snake-like and sibilant.

The Doctor stepped back as the guard's face seemed to set alight with a blinding red energy. Quixote and Sancho watched with open mouths, as did the collection of prisoners. Eventually, the light faded, and the guard transformed into an entirely different, yet familiar shape, confirming the Doctor's suspicions.

"This is the creature you seek, Sorcerer?" asked Quixote nervously. "What in the world is it?"

"That, good knight..." the Doctor said, "...is a Zygon."

The Zygon let out a whispery screech and leapt from the horse, colliding with the Doctor and knocking him to the ground. It was on top of him, clawing and scratching, when suddenly a small area of its mouth began to expand. The Doctor immediately recognised it as a venom sac, and knew that any second now it would spray a toxic liquid directly into his face. At the last moment, Quixote managed to pull the Zygon away and the jet black venom shot out on to the dry grass, narrowly missing the Doctor's head.

The creature switched its attention to Quixote, hissing and striding toward him. He hit out at it with his fists, but the impact did nothing to slow the creature down. Sancho watched helplessly as the Zygon reached out to Don Quixote, its sucker-covered hands producing small, lethal looking shards. He looked to the Doctor, hoping he had something up his sleeve. Thankfully, he did.

With a confident flourish he pointed the sonic screwdriver at the chain gang. One by one each of the locks began to open, a satisfying metallic click travelling along the line of men, the irons in which they were held captive clattering to the floor. It took each of them a moment to realise they were suddenly free, but when they did they followed the example of the man at the front of the line, which was to pick up rocks from the ground and hurl them at their oppressor.

The stones bounced off the Zygon's scaly hide, forcing it to turn and face the crowd of men, leaving Quixote laid out on the dry grass.

It hissed at the men, ready to attack, but hesitated when it realised each of them was weighing up a rock in each hand, savouring what they were about to do.

All at once they launched their projectiles at the Zygon, knocking it unconscious almost immediately, watching and cheering as it toppled face-first into the dirt. The Doctor smiled at the jubilation of the freed prisoners.

But the cheers soon died down and the scene fell silent, the men turned their attention to the trio who had released them, unsure as to their intentions.

Don Quixote pulled himself up, and placed one foot on the Zygons back.

"The creature which would have you imprisoned is slain. Now go, and tell your

people that you were freed by the most noble of knight errants." Quixote gestured with an open palm, "the Sorcerer known as "Doctor".

The smile fell from the Doctor's face.

The prisoners ran off into the fields.

"Pass those chains." The Doctor snarled.

Rocinante and Dapple stood tied, once again, outside the windmill. Inside, Sancho sat perched on one of the hay bales whilst Quixote waited with nervous anticipation for the Doctor to return.

Finally, the TARDIS door opened and The Doctor emerged, his expression sombre and serious once again.

"What will you do with it?" Quixote asked.

"I'll take him to the people that need to speak with him." The Doctor replied solemnly. "Are there more of those monsters out there?" Sancho asked worriedly, hopping down from the hay bale and standing by the side of his master.

"No." The Doctor began thoughtfully, stroking his beard as he spoke. "Seems he got left behind, came with others to England around forty-odd years ago. Eventually made his way here I suppose."

"I afraid I don't entirely understand Sorcerer." said Quixote.

"Nor do I." said the Doctor, forcing a smile. "Perhaps I'll look into it one of these days, little birthday treat to myself perhaps?"

"But Sorcerer," Sancho exclaimed, "how is it that my master could see through the creature's disguise, to see its true form?"

The Doctor smiled and placed a hand on Quixote's shoulder.

"Perspective," he said, "most men's eyes are closed, but yours are open. You can see between the cracks, behind the curtain, even if you don't always know what you are seeing." To his surprise, Quixote fell to his knees, gasping.

The Doctor knelt down in front of him.

"Are you alright?" He asked thoughtfully.

"Many a man would call me mad." Quixote whispered to him. "I fear I am but a fool in the eyes of others."

"Don Quixote de la Mancha, I am here to tell you that you are most certainly a fool in the eyes of others." Quixote looked mortified, as though being read his last rites. "However," The Doctor smiled, "so am I."

Quixote smiled back, and the two men began to laugh together, standing and

embracing each other like old friends.

"The giants?" Sancho interrupted. "What were the giants where I saw windmills?"

The Doctor look flustered, searching for an answer. He opted to change the subject instead.

"Sancho Panza," he beamed, "it has been a pleasure. I only wish all companions were as loyal as you."

Sancho shook the Doctor's hand enthusiastically.

"Thank you Sorcerer." he said graciously.

With a noble nod to Don Quixote, The Doctor turned and opened the door of the TARDIS.

"*Doctor*..." Quixote called after him.

The Doctor stopped in his tracks, slowly turning around in the doorway, no longer smiling.

"Forgive me. But you no longer feel worthy of that title?" Quixote continued carefully.

The Doctor said nothing.

Quixote walked slowly toward him, and removing the rusted shaving basin from his head, handed it to the Doctor.

"Our code is the same Doctor: to defend the helpless, and destroy the wicked. If I am ever to be worthy of the title of Don Quixote de la Mancha, then it will be through the inspiration of men like you. I deem you worthy of your title, and I suspect one day, you will once again come to call yourself Doctor."

The Doctor stood silent for a moment, handed the helmet back to Quixote, and closed the doors without a word.

Don Quixote de La Mancha and Sancho Panza stood and watched in awed silence as the TARDIS dematerialised before their eyes, the Doctor travelling onward to face giants of his own.

Fall

by Matt Barber

I'd been stationed at the Oakleaf Residential Home for Retired Soldiers for three quiet years when my old friend visited for the final time. He had the habit of turning up wearing one face or another, to keep me company. Often he came to share a glass of a very expensive brandy that he claimed he'd personally liberated from the private cellar of Napoleon 'from right under the nose of the Emperor'. Sometimes he came simply to share a nostalgic meal and to talk over the old times. Such tall tales the man could tell about monsters and demons and goodness knows what else – all of which, I suspect, were true.

That last visit took place sometime around bonfire night: my joints cracked with the early chill of the season and the sap of my blood had begun to run dry in my veins. My memory, I'm ashamed to say, had become as curtailed and clouded as a November day. I'd been for my usual lunch in the mess with my fellow inmates, although perhaps comrades would be a more apt expression, and had returned to my room.

And there he stood.

This new face had a look of Don Quixote about it. His clothing resembled those of an impoverished aristocrat. His eyes contained that mixture of dedication and slight insanity shared by the Japanese soldiers who were abandoned in the South Asian jungles and still fighting the Second World War decades after the armistice had been signed. I could understand this. I'm a soldier as well, and retirement doesn't mean anything when you've spent your life fighting. You die aged, weary, battle-hardened warriors unable to retire or retreat.

This time, my friend had not brought brandy.

He sat opposite me, silent for a long time, inscrutably unblinking.

"There was a war," he rasped suddenly, sounding as weary, as *leathery* as his clothes. "There *is* a war. It's reached Earth, Alistair. I need you." His eyes flicked away from mine. "I need your help" he said. I felt my back straighten at the thought of action. "Understood. What do you need?" I asked.

I was touched. I'll admit that I'm not used to being a supporting artist – I command men. I don't ask questions, I give orders. My friend was clearly at a moment in his long

life when the fight had become overwhelming and had turned to me, a fellow soldier, for advice. When he spoke, his voice *creaked*.

"Krynoids"

As you get older, events in the past, even ones as unique and fantastical as mine, tend to fall away from you like autumn leaves from a tree. "Ah yes", I blustered, "Krynoids... Nasty blighters… Remind me?"

"Think Axons only greener. Aggressive, invasive vegetable creatures. They… attached themselves to the nearest life-form and *absorb* them, younger flesh the better. They find old flesh… indigestible. As you say: 'nasty blighters.'"

He winced as though my gaze caused him pain in some way. In his eyes I could see the pain of a veteran with the weight of war bearing down on him. They used to call it 'shell shock' in my day. I asked him the question I knew he didn't want to answer: "What is this 'war' exactly? You've fought battles before, why is this one so different?"

He turned away, frustrated by the change in subject, or perhaps by a sense of time running out. Ironic for him, I felt.

"A war across whole of time and space. It's cruel, vicious and all-encompassing slaughter. I've managed to protect the Earth, but it's taken everything I have, my life and my friends. It's meant sacrifice on a scale you couldn't even conceive." He turned away. "Even a single Krynoid pod on Earth is a potential catastrophe."

My friend pulled a hip-flask from his pocket. It was as ancient and battered as the jacket that contained it, and was filmed with a fine layer of dust. He unstoppered it, and took a brief swig. He didn't share it. "But this pod was different. You see, it's so difficult to be in the right places these days. The TARDIS used to take me where I was needed, but… well… it didn't *approve* of the things I was forced to do by the war. I deactivated the telepathic circuits*. Sacrifice,* Alistair. I was able to chart the temporal effect of this pod through the future – its path burned that fiercely through history. It'll change the course of the whole war unless I… we… do something about it. Now, what's the time? The *exact* time?"

Here the hours, days, sometimes even the seasons slip past without my noticing. I tugged on my alarm cord and, moments later, Corporal Selma Butterworth, my batman, materialised.

"Time, Corporal?"

"Ten past two Sir."

"Oh, Butterworth?" My friend's voice was quiet but cuttingly commanding.

"Yes Sir?" she replied, picking up on my friend's authority.

"Have you heard any unusual noises outside?"

"Now you mention it sir, there was a rumble a few minutes ago. I thought it was just those bin men coming late. They're shocking, something…"

My friend turned away from Butterworth and gripped my arm. “Alistair, we should take cover. Something rather unpleasant and *very* dramatic is about to happen.”

My mind whirred. It was whilst I was busy carefully plotting our next move, and whilst Butterworth was continuing to critique the local council services, that the nursing home blew up.

The Oakleaf Residential Home for Retired Soldiers was founded in 1992. It was housed in the converted headquarters of an international military organisation and the majority of the founding residents of the retirement home were ex-employees of the same organisation that occupied it through the 1970s and 1980s. The walls were thickened with reinforced concrete, the windows were formed from heavy steel sections and plate providing blast and ballistic resistance, whilst the doors were constructed from cold rolled steel sections providing both security and resistance against most explosive attacks. Even the wallpaper: a cutting-edge, meshed Kevlar composite, was resistant to blast.

In short, the Oakleaf Residential Home for Retired Soldiers was bombproof.

Despite all the structural enhancements to the building, I could feel the heat of the explosion wash around me; I heard the stressed wood creak above and, suddenly, found that I was struggling to breathe through a dirty mist of plaster dust. I could hear a thumping downstairs as if someone was using a battering ram against the front door.

As Corporal Butterworth moved stiffly to the door to check the corridor, my friend grasped my arm.

“We have to leave, Alistair.” He barked in a voice made gruff by dust and age.

Beside the standard red panic-cord, I had had installed a special second alarm. Within thirty seconds, we could hear the sound of many feet approaching along the corridor as fifteen of my fellow residents gathered in my room. Most were wearing slippers, some were wrapped in khaki dressing gowns. All were heavily armed. My friend addressed the mustered residents:

“Ladies and gentlemen: I’m afraid that the British Army is no longer British. The Krynoid’s been augmented somehow. It’s sending out an enhanced, local telepathic signal. But I can’t imagine even with added Dalek technology an un-propagated Krynoid pod would have enough *anima* to transmit a control signal for a radius of more than ten or twenty miles.” He inspected my fellow residents “You appear to have an army of your own, Alistair?” My friend declared with a touch of irony.

“An army, sir, and a small arsenal.” Sergeant Philips raised a Bren L4A4 NATO machine gun, whilst I noticed that Corporal Butterworth was armed with a chunky Browning High-Power Mark I handgun. In one smooth and trained movement, the Corporal checked that it was loaded.

“We keep the firearms in one of the cleaning cupboards, sir. Steel lined.” Captain

Morris explained to my friend. Good man Morris. He retired early after the Stahlman affair, his mind broken. Moved into civilian intelligence work but then, twenty years on he found, like so many of my men who were around during Project: Inferno, he had contracted a nasty form of lung cancer. UNIT looks after their own though, so he moved to Oakleaf, and pottered about the gardens whilst the disease spread slowly through his body like the tendrils of some weed, eating him from the inside.

"Do you have a helicopter in there?" my friend asked somewhat wryly. There was a glint of curious admiration in the way he was inspecting the weapons.

"No sir" said Morris, "We keep the chopper hidden between the tennis courts and the summerhouse."

Too many retirement homes are built with only one way of getting out: on a hospital stretcher. To avoid this eventuality, when I was consulted over the construction of Oakleaf, I made sure that it came with an escape tunnel. As a second explosion rocked the building and the door lintel fractured with a crack I pushed my friend into the television room and accessed the concealed passage.

"Captain? You and Sergeant Philips. Don't let anyone through at any cost. Corporal Butterworth! You and the rest of the men come with us."

Sergeant Philips, a relatively young man in his early sixties, joined UNIT from the regulars just in time for that business in Scotland. For the past three years he'd been a combination of resident and carer at Oakleaf maintaining his military skills but also gaining the inevitable weight that retirement brings. Now I needed him to be a soldier again. I saw in his eyes a recognition of what I was asking him to do. Done it countless times in my career. The bitterest pill to swallow as a commanding officer isn't risking your own life, it's accepting that sometimes you have to sacrifice the lives of your men. He shouldered his weapon and gave a grim nod.

The sound of gunfire receding behind us, we burst up from the tunnel behind a tired and withering rhododendron bush. I immediately gave the order for the camouflaged Lynx AH.6 helicopter to be prepped. Corporal Butterworth, the best pilot at Oakleaf, pulled the camouflage sheet off over the rotor blades, swung open the door and settled into the cockpit. Butterworth flipped switches and studied the various gauges, occasionally tapping at them.

"We *have* to find the Krynoid pod. I've made a detector." My friend pulled a complicated looking gadget out of his pocket which, like his hipflask, emerged in a puff of old dust. "We're close, Alistair, very close. But I need to get out of here to be certain." My friend peered at his Krynoid detector, frowning over the readings and shaking his head. "I don't know how the Daleks have done it. This technological enhancement is so far beyond them. Genetic manipulation, I could understand, but this is extraordinary. These readings. It's like the telepathic control uses some variety of advanced temporal technology. I'm not sure why you and your friends haven't fallen under the influence… Oh, of course. UNIT training Brigadier?"

He thwacked the detector against the palm of his hand and it made a cheap pinging

noise, as if a spring had come loose. He turned to face me. “Once we’re in the air,” he said “We’ll be able to pinpoint the location. The pod must have landed somewhere near and been ‘recovered’ by the soldiers. Is there a military base nearby?”

“Yes – Dervenham.”

“That’ll be the most likely destination. Alistair. Bunkers, strong-rooms. Ideal place for hiding.”

The helicopter blades began to whip and slice the air, the contraption shuddered once and then lifted smoothly off the ground.

“I think I know a place. An old atomic shelter. This gadget of yours, can it find things underground?”

“It detects temporal ripples across the whole of time and space. And I built it myself. Of course it can detect things that are underground. Butterworth! Kindly head northeast for three miles.”

Below us, I could see the patchwork farmland and copses of the north Wessex downs, chilled and lightly frosted in the autumn sun: my home. I seem to have spent half my career defending the world against monsters and megalomaniacs in fields like these. I’ve fought battles that will never enter the history books and that most people wouldn’t even believe. Looking at my friend, I wondered whether that was what it was like for him, defending the whole of reality without thanks or recognition. Suddenly I felt old and tired. I knew I was close to death, the long years had withered me and all that was left of me was the dry husk of a tree without leaves. Momentarily, I wondered why he needed me, an aging and broken man, a weakening heart encased in decaying flesh.

Corporal Butterworth began a sickening sequence of manoeuvres that dipped and pitched the Lynx. I stared fixedly at the landscape blurring past and listened to the thrumming heartbeat of the blades above my head. Suddenly Corporal Butterworth gasped, the controls twisting out of the soldier’s hands. Suddenly and horribly, the thrumming stopped and the blades began to slow down.

With a terrible lurch, the Lynx rolled to one side and began to plummet towards the chalk plain.

As the helicopter dropped, I remember looking at my hands and the loose, liver-spotted skin on the backs of them. The Lynx span and rolled out of control, and the G-force of the fall caused my skin to pucker and ridge. Suddenly, my fellow passenger’s hand grasped mine and snapped a bracelet over my wrist. I could see the ground whirling towards us and I strained to look into my friend’s face. It was blandly impassive and calm, almost empty.

I blinked…

…and found myself lying in grass on the side of a low hill feeling giddy and nauseous.

The sky above me loured blackly, the clouds skidding and wheeling. I looked uneasily into the distance and could see a plume of dirty smoke columning into the sky.

He spoke: "Time-bracelet. Only one journey left in it and only enough power for two passengers. I thought they might try something like this, so I took the opportunity to change the settings before we took off. It's put us down in the nearest safe location. I'd say they used a High-Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse to disable the helicopter. Has that been invented yet…?"

I first met Corporal, then Private, Butterworth, in 1968. I was in my early forties and the young soldier was twenty two. Butterworth's original career-path was conventional: a small village school in Middlesex, left at sixteen, joined the regular army. This career-path veered away from the conventional when Butterworth saw action in the 1960s fighting Cybermen in the sewers of London and was then drafted into the fledgling UNIT - one week overseeing peace conferences, the next battling Satanists in a small village in Wiltshire. Corporal Butterworth retired having been awarded a number of medals, none of which were made public, but all of which were kept in a drawer, neatly and privately arranged. And now lying in a field, twisted in the metal skeleton of a secret helicopter, she was dead, because my friend's magic bracelet didn't have enough power. *Sacrifice, Alistair*.

He helped me to my feet and drew out his gadget. "We're very close Alistair. Almost on top of the pod." He pointed at a concrete pillbox in the hollow of the valley in front of us. "There." He declared, striding off before I could stop him.

I roused myself, shook my head clear of the vertiginous nausea. Butterworth's death had hit me for six, but the real shock was how quickly my friend had dismissed it as collateral damage. I turned around to face the bluff of the hill and saw, to my horror, a line of Krynoid controlled soldiers standing eerily still, as if waiting for us to attempt our next move.

The ground shook beneath us as we stumbled for insufficient cover behind a tree. My heart thumped dangerously hard whilst my friend rummaged in his pockets, dragged out his Krynoid detector and began to frantically pull out wires, plugging them back seemingly at random. Behind us the soldiers slowly advanced, I saw some carrying grenade launchers, and one carried an enormous, blunt gun that I assumed was the EMP weapon. The Krynoid detector began to ping repeatedly. My friend slapped it once and roughly rattled it. The soldiers stopped.

"This is getting warm, it won't last long," he warned.

"What have you done?"

"I reversed the settings on the detector and blocked the signal. Simple, really. This device is very adaptable, though it only works while we're this close to the pod. Come on Alistair."

We raced towards the pillbox, passing soldiers who stood like waxworks, their unblinking eyes slowly turning bloodshot in the cold wind. "Will they be alright?" I asked.

"No idea," he said dismissively, "they'll probably have pretty bad headaches. Come

along Alistair, the thing is getting hotter."

We reached the pillbox. Up close, it didn't seem like a building, so much as an extrusion of rock rising out of the chalk downland. There was no discernible entrance, only rough, blank concrete walls covered in old ivy. With a jolt I realised it was similar in size and shape to my friend's TARDIS, but lacked any of the time machine's character that, curiously, was simultaneously English and universal.

"They're coming." Sluggishly, as if walking through the mire of a vast winter battlefield, the soldiers were advancing towards us. A cold wind whipped around us, swirling in a vortex that took my breath away. My heart began to thump in my head, a rhythmic, pulsing rumble. Suddenly, I realised that the rumble wasn't coming from me at all, but that came from a distance somewhere over the bluff. A tank rolled over the crest of the hill carrying a selection of my fellow residents. They began shooting and the soldiers dropped to the ground. "They found the tank!" I shouted over the noise.

"Tank?" My friend cried.

"Yes, the spare one from the greenhouse! Great heavens – it's Captain Morris – still in his dressing gown! That man is indestructible! I can't make out what are they carrying? Are they sniper rifles?"

"No Alistair: tranquiliser guns! Come on, this is our chance: we have to get inside." He began to circle the pillbox and then drew out his sonic screwdriver. He adjusted the setting, waved it towards the concrete and then analysed the results. "Ah, how ingenious… it's not a pillbox, Alistair!" He pulled himself up onto the top of the concrete tower with surprising agility, applied his sonic screwdriver once again and, to my amazement, the whole pillar began to sink into the chalk. "It's a lift. Going down?"

Under the concrete pillar, deep in the earth, it was warm. This was not a nuclear shelter: it was alien. Metal and coral struts intertwined to create a womb-like chamber. The light was hard green and came from the walls. In the centre of the chamber, squatting on a plinth and entwined with a filigree of silver wire, sat what I assumed was the Krynoid pod. My friend approached it cautiously and examined it. "Not Daleks," he gasped, "this technology is Time Lord."

He stared unblinkingly at me and I understood suddenly that he hadn't wanted me for my military advice. Something in his eyes told me I hadn't been helping him find the pod. Instead, he'd been leading me to it.

"It's time to tell me what exactly you need, Doctor?" He blinked at that, and his eyes were moist.

"No," he said, "not Doctor. Not for many years. Maybe never again after today." He pulled out his detector, and again began to rewire it once again. Whilst he did so, he explained why he had brought me.

"Many centuries ago, I was made an offer. Time and space was burning; the time war was consuming everything as my own people and the Daleks launched offensive after offensive to gain the upper-hand. But when your battleground is the whole of reality, there *is* no upper-hand to gain. I chose to become the man that was needed at that moment: a warrior. Like you, Brigadier. And, like a good warrior, I trained. For all its parochial art, culture and civilization, there is one thing your planet is universally known for: its ability to wage war. Gallifrey knows it, and so do the Daleks. I travelled through the history of the Earth. I sat at the feet of Genghis Khan and in the saddle next to Alexander the Great; I taught Julius Caesar how to play chess and helped Sun Tzu with his first draft. They taught me how to fight by doing what had to be done, at any cost; they taught me the virtues of a new morality."

He finished with his device and switched it on.

"There's a reason the pod hasn't germinated yet. The technology, the *Time Lord* technology, has enhanced its natural telepathic power, but the psychic power of the Krynoid is at its greatest in this state. When the pod attaches to another living creature, it enters a dormant phase, all its energy becomes focussed on transformation and occupation."

His face was bleached pale and his hands shook. It was as if he was containing something within him, something that strained and took all his willpower to keep at bay. I suspected that I was seeing the price he was paying to fight his war.

"You're going to die Brigadier. Soon. I don't know exactly when; I don't *want* to know, but you don't have much time left. You know that though, don't you?" He moved around the plinth to stand close to me. "The Krynoid feeds off life, so it's attracted to the energy of the young and vital. I've interfered with the telepathic signals so now the Krynoid won't know the difference between young flesh and…"

"…and mine?"

"Yes…. Yours. After it… joins with you, the Krynoid will be almost dormant, growing very slowly and when…"

"…When I die?"

"….When you die, the Krynoid will die with you. It won't hurt, I can promise you that."

"Will it… Will I be taken over?"

He moved to the pod and held his hand towards mine. It had stopped shaking.

"There won't be time, Alistair. There won't be time." He paused and finally looked me in the eye. I met his gazed unblinking, feeling like a soldier once again. "Your last mission, Brigadier? You and me: saving the whole of reality, just one more time?"

I joined my friend and held out my arm.

Morris died soon after, finally succumbing to his cancer as peacefully as it would allow him. This was his final adventure as well. I still think of his as he rode the tank across the chalk plains. Despite his illness and emaciation, I could see triumph, purpose, *victory* in his eyes. And Philips. And Butterworth. Despite the terrible thing I was asking of them, the sacrifice I needed from them, I could tell that this was *right* for them. Some men and women aren't supposed to die slowly in a nursing home. Some are fated to have one last 'hurrah'.

And now, nearing the end of my long life back at Oakleaf, as I sit in my chair, I feel the slack tick-tock of the Krynoid invading my flesh and tugging at my mind. Sometimes, when I sleep, I have nightmares in which my bones take root, my skin dries and turns brown like the bark of a tree and my mouth rots with moss and sap.

I know that that was the last time I would see him, and that having led me to the Krynoid he would not return.

I remember my friend as he used to be: passionate, curious, sometimes cynical but always with a core of whimsical frivolity. Behind those ruthless eyes and the inch-thick, war-scarred hide - as he held the Krynoid pod out towards me - even as the seed pod cracked open and the tendrils wrapped around and through me - I could see in his face a glimmer of our old adventures. Behind the warrior's carapace, I caught a glimpse of the mischievous compassion that made the Doctor who he was, and the friend I will never forget. Until the cold fingers of winter that pinch at me even as I think of him now, carry me away.

Always Face the Curtain with a Bow

by Jon Arnold

He woke.

Where the hell was he? A large, well lit room, furnished with a desk and chair, a chest and a reasonably well-stocked bookcase. He was lying on a huge, soft bed, a carpet so thick you practically had to groom it and an ornate window looking out to some hills so green he'd swear they'd been photoshopped. If this was a Dalek prison, it was an imaginative and unusual one. And imaginative was one of the many things Daleks weren't. Not unless it involved death.

He rolled over to the edge of the bed – all limbs working then, no paralysis, no physical damage. Good. Check the pockets, what have they left you with? Sonic – gone. TARDIS key – gone. But that was all they'd taken. This coat didn't have the dimensionally transcendental pockets some of his previous jackets had – couldn't trust them any more, not with the Daleks mining so many of the dimensions the Time Lord folded their rooms and belongings into. So what had he got? You can do a lot with… an apple, a piece of string and a grunzit calibrator. Well, maybe not that much. He sidled up to the window, just in case it was a trap and there were a horde of Daleks hiding on the other side waiting to blow him away. He waved a hand in front of it – if you were going to lose something, better a hand then a head. Not even a post-regenerative Time Lord could replace a head.

Nothing.

Still cautious, he flicked the catch up, easing the window open slowly. He sniffed… nothing. Earth level mixtures of oxygen and nitrogen, barely any pollutants. The sort of place you hoped to preserve from the war, a little pocket of tranquillity in troubled times. And a tender trap.

He hated it.

They'd removed him from the war. He could feel softness creeping into his thoughts, inveigling itself into his mind. His limbs, with their seemingly permanent aches and pains, begging him to simply return to the bed and rest. But that would be a betrayal of his solemn vow after regeneration. Doctor no more, warrior instead…

There was a knock on the door.

"Doctor, we know you're awake. May I come in?" Without waiting for a reply a face appeared around the door, wearing a solicitous expression. "Glad to see you up and about."

"I haven't been the Doctor for quite some time now." Where am I?" Millennia of war had eroded away his politeness and tolerance.

"All in good time dear chap, all in good time. Now where was I? Ah yes…"

And before the former Doctor could move, the man whipped out a baroque gun from his pocket. He fired three times. Once through the left heart, once through the right heart. And the last shot through the throat. Everything was still for a second.

The body swayed slightly and pitched forward, as if disbelieving that anyone could do that to it. It fell to the floor, leaving the head to roll up against the bed. The man picked up the head, which wore a slightly startled expression which the victim probably wouldn't have chosen as his very final one. He examined it, looking into the eyes.

"Alas, poor Yorick…" he chuckled, and tossed the head to the middle of the bed, where the still open eyes gazed upward to the ceiling.

The Doctor was dead. It had begun.

He woke.

Where the hell was he? A large, well lit room, furnished with a desk and a chair, a chest and a reasonably well stocked bookcase. He was lying on a huge, soft bed, carpet so thick you practically had to groom it and an ornate window looking out to some hills so green he'd swear they'd been photoshopped. If this was a Dalek prison, it was an imaginative and unusual one. And imaginative was one of the many things Daleks weren't. Not unless it involved death.

He rolled over to the edge of the bed – all limbs working then, no paralysis, no physical damage. Good. Check the pockets, what have they left you with? Sonic – gone. TARDIS key – gone. But that was all they'd taken. This coat didn't have the dimensionally transcendental pockets some of his previous jackets had – couldn't trust them any more, not with the Daleks mining so many of the dimensions the Time Lord folded their rooms and belongings into. So what had he got? You can do a lot with… an apple, a piece of string and a grunzit calibrator. Well, maybe not that much... He sidled up to the window, just in case it was a trap and there were a horde of Daleks hiding on the other side waiting to blow him away. Waved a hand in front of it – if you were going to lose something, better a hand then a head. Not even a post-regenerative Time Lord could replace a head.

Nothing.

Still cautious he flicked the catch up, easing the window open slowly. He sniffed… nothing. Earth level mixtures of oxygen and nitrogen, barely any pollutants. The sort of planet you hoped to preserve from the War, where you could send physically and mentally

scarred people to recover. A little like the Eye of Orion. A little pocket of tranquillity in troubled times. And a tender tr…

Hang on.

This all seemed familiar. He'd been here before. Time loop? He shook his head. No… he couldn't sense any of the temporal energies associated with a time loop. No chronic hysteresis, recursive occlusion or infinity wreath. Déjà vu? Possibly… this body was getting old now and had seen so much… Bound to see similar things if an incarnation lasted so long. And this one had lasted longer than any since his first. His memory had started to play tricks on him toward the end of that body too. And conflict was so wearing on mind and body that breakdowns were inevitable...

There was a knock on the door.

He remembered this again. A man. And a gun. And a moment of pain. His hand involuntarily went to his throat.

"Doctor, I know you're awake. May I come in?"

His combat reflexes kicked in. Belying his age he dived for the only available cover, behind the bed.

Again, the man didn't wait for an answer. This time though, when he popped his head round the door he couldn't see the Doctor. "Oh don't worry Doctor, I'm not going to shoot you this time."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Oh you don't, you'll just have to trust me. Which, I appreciate, isn't easy in the circumstances."

He peered cautiously round the side of the bed. The man stood there, almost comical with his hands in air in a pose of surrender. "You see? Whatever else I may be I'm a man of my word."

The former Doctor's body creaked as he raised himself from the floor. His gaze remained suspicious, but the man maintained his distance, his body language remained unthreatening, and his eyes retained an amused look.

"Come now Doctor, let's be civilised about this. It's a little early in the day, so perhaps some Nuselonian tea to start? Or are you so much the soldier now that a shot of Albraxian whisky is more your style?"

"I've told you before… I'm not the Doctor anymore." He was sure he'd told this man exactly that… but when? Damned memory…

The warrior formerly known as the Doctor made his way out of the door. But, ever the soldier, he made sure he never exposed his back to a man who'd already admitted to killing him once.

Birds sang sweetly as they took their seats at the garden table. The warrior surveyed the surroundings. They seemed to be in a sort of English country estate, one that sought to dazzle with scale and immaculate good taste. They'd descended an ornate staircase, passing by a huge first floor ballroom, and exited to the rear of the house where a patio gave way to a huge lawn, bordered at some distance by a forest. The open window, two stories up in the west wing, indicated 'his' room – every other room window was closed. Useful to know perhaps. In the middle of the lawn, a table with a sunshade and a couple of chairs were set. Not something the English usually needed, even at the height of their summer… The lack of rain was a clear indication that whoever had made this place hadn't done their homework.

The man passed him his cup of tea. He sniffed at it suspiciously… as it should be, it was remarkably close to the aroma of Earl Grey. The tea, not the Prime Minister. Although come to think of it the Earl had smelled quite… tea-y. No obvious toxins in this cup, beyond the ones that should be there. He dipped the tip of his little finger in gingerly, Not being eaten away, so nothing DNA melting in there. No Vetroxis parasites either: nasty little purple buggers, drawn to heat. When they got inside you, they exuded a mass of fine tendrils that gradually sapped your energy, your self-control and finally your mind. Not fussy about which orifice they entered through, which made using the toilets on Vetrox a risky business.

Pouring himself a cup from the same pot, the man sat down across the table from him. He raised it to his lips and sipped.

"Happy now?"

"Yes, thank you." The Doctor let the tea steam for a little. Might be a strange habit, but he preferred his tea a little cooler these days.

"My apologies for the rudeness of our introduction yesterday." The man offered the Doctor his hand. The Doctor demurred, so the man held his palm out to indicate it was empty. Cautiously the Doctor shook hands with him. "I'm the Colonel. Sadly retired. Delighted to make your acquaintance though!"

"Retired?"

The Colonel made a sweeping gesture encompassing the mansion and grounds. "Not much call for soldiers here. All quiet on this front."

"Yes, not really my kind of place I must say."

"Quite. So, you have my name… if you've abandoned that title you've worn for so long, what do you call yourself now?"

Casual violence to small talk. Strange chap mused the Doctor. "It very much depends on the circumstances. But calling myself 'Doctor' seemed… inappropriate given the circumstances. The universe didn't seem to need one."

"Surely it needed one more than ever?"

"Maybe… my last body wasn't my wisest. I've had to live with his decision.

Sometimes…" he sighed looking around at the tranquillity and peace of the garden, "sometimes I regret it. But it seems foolish to regret another man's decision doesn't it? Even when it shapes your whole life."

"Quite. The perils of being born Gallifreyan. We can choose our friends but we can't choose our past selves."

"You're Gallifreyan then?"

The Colonel smiled, but there was a shadow behind the smile. He sipped at his tea again, as if picking his reply carefully. "Well I was. I'm not quite sure any more."

"I'm brought to some kind of paradise and I still can't get away from Time Lords and their cryptic crossword minds." He laughed without humour.

"Oh as I said Doctor, I'm not quite a Time Lord any more. I'm something quite unique."

"You're a precious unique flower, just like everyone else."

"In my case Doctor… it's true. He held up his right hand. It wasn't unusual – same design as most Gallifreyans, five fingers, slightly pallid skin tone from too much time indoors. But the man who had been the Doctor narrowed his gaze a little. The veins running through the skin were silvery, and a small crackle accompanied each movement.

"Mercury and static electricity. It's all that holds me together now." Now that the Doctor looked more closely he noticed that even the other man's irises were silvered over.

"Dalek technology?"

"They found me, dying in the last nanoseconds of a bear-trap timeline. And they put me back together with what they had left... I live on their sufferance now. Do their bidding to the last letter or they turn off the static field…" The man took a deep breath. "Reduced to this… I was like you, a soldier in the war. I fought because I had to, not because I wanted to. And because I had a hero to inspire me."

"Don't tell me you're one of those who looked up to Rassilon. Just pray you never meet the pompous old fool."

That same bittersweet expression and chuckle. "No… not him… never him. You should hear what we called him out there."

"Oh I heard. I invented most of them myself."

"So rumour said. The only one who'd stand up to him." The Colonel looked at his guest in a manner that was half-curious and half-respectful.

"Stuff and nonsense - I was just louder than everyone else. Because someone needed to be."

"And that's how legends spread. You were an inspiration, and so we went to war."

"In my name… One thing I never imagined, becoming the Lord Kitchener of the

Time Lords." He sipped at the tea and grinned ruefully. "I rather hope I last this war better than he did his."

Again, the bitter smile. "Sorry. The war's over for you Doctor. Finished. Done with. Kaput."

"What are you talking about? It's a time war. It can never be over."

"Oh it's still going on outside. Just without you."

"So that's it is it? This is a prison." He glanced about contemptuously at all the useless beauty. "I've been in worse. But I'll find a way out."

"Without your TARDIS? Without your sonic screwdriver?"

"There's always hope." One of his mantras. One he'd never abandoned, even in this body. Especially never in this body – what was the point of fighting without hope?

"The place has been sealed off from the rest of the universe temporally and spatially. A pocket dimension compacted and set adrift in the Cataracts of Non-Existence at the end of the universe. Beyond Time Lord technology to detect. At the limits of even Dalek technology. We're trapped here, just you and me. Forever."

The warrior remained impassive, deliberately betraying no reaction. "I might have hoped for better company."

"I say forever… there is one chance for you." One of the impressively bushy eyebrows quizzically raised itself. "Give up the secrets of the Time Lords. Lay bare Gallifrey's defences, the secrets of the TARDISes. Tell me where Rassilon lurks. And why Earth's so important that you've had to hide it."

The warrior laughed. "You're asking me to steal the universe's hope. Grind the last hope against the Daleks into the soil forever." The laughter stopped quickly and he became all steel. "I'd rather die."

The Colonel's turn to laugh, almost bitterly. "You already have. And you will again."

"Nice of you to make your intentions clear."

Again, sadness. "Believe me Doctor, I regret it every bit as much as you do." A moment's pause as he reflected on the ridiculousness of his words. "But is not something I do through choice. Sorry about the tea though."

The tea? Had the fellow lost his mind?

"Yes. Because it's laced with a temporal poison. I took the antidote before I met you today, but in oh… I'd say fifteen seconds the poison will kick in, setting up a chain reaction that will cause every molecule of your body to dislocate in time. You'll be reduced to a cloud of free floating atoms scattered through the history of this place."

The Doctor lunged across the table, grabbing the man by the lapels of his very fine white morning suit. "Give me the antidote. Now!" The man just shook his head sadly. The Doctor threw the man back on the chair. His glare seemed to hang Cheshire Cat like in the

air as every molecule of him separated and vanished, leaving his now unoccupied clothes to fall to the floor.

The Colonel just shook his head regretfully at what he had done.

He woke.

Where the hell was he? Huge, soft bed, carpet so thick you practically had to groom it and an ornate window looking on to some hills so green he'd swear they'd been photoshopped in. If this was a Dalek prison, it was an imaginative and unusual one. And one of the many things Daleks weren't was imaginative. Not unless it involved death.

He rolled over to the edge of the bed… and his eyes narrowed. This was definitely familiar. And this was nothing to do with hotel rooms all looking the same. His eyes flicked towards the door, anticipating the knock. He was rather caught out when the telephone on the bedside rang. He let it ring while he examined the handset. And then he decided to ignore it.

The damn thing kept ringing. Wouldn't stop ringing. Even kept ringing when he pulled the connection from the wall. Even when he put a pillow over his head. Even when he put the myriad pillows over the phone and buried it deeper than a Silurian miner. It just kept going. When he got back to Earth he'd be heading straight to see Bell.

Damn it all, if it was booby trapped it was booby trapped. He picked up the handset. "Hello?"

"Morning Doctor! Glad you're up and about again. Do come and join me… I'll just keep ringing until you do."

He sighed wearily. No sleep, even for the dead.

"Well?"

"So brusque Doctor!" The glare almost dented the armour of the Colonel's cheerful demeanour." Oh I forgot myself… we're going to have to find you a name you know."

"We really are not. Certainly you're not anyway."

"So grumpy Doc-" he caught himself. "Take a seat anyway."

"Certainly not. After the last couple of times it's almost certainly booby trapped."

"Paranoia's so unattractive."

"It's kept me alive."

The Colonel smiled again "Well, not here. It's pointless here. It won't keep you alive, not for a day. So you might as well relax and enjoy yourself."

Scowling, the non-Doctor sat down with bad grace. And didn't touch the steaming cup of tea. "I won't tell you anything you know."

"No, not yet. They were anticipating you'd say that. It really is most unfortunate." Out on the lawn rabbits disturbed the tranquillity of the vast grounds, hopping round and nibbling away at the grass.

"Unfortunate?"

"Unfortunate. Because it just means I'm going to have to kill you again."

"If you don't mind me saying so you've done a very bad job of it so far. I'm still here you know."

The rabbits drew closer, the relative stillness of the two men emboldening them.

"Quite the contrary. I've been more successful than any single species you care to name. You don't know how jealous people are of me."

"I can imagine." The rabbits began nibbling at the grass around the Doctor's feet.

"They couldn't give this to someone who enjoyed it you know. There was the risk that they might actually kill you once and for all."

"Always the problem with sadists. They don't know when to stop."

"You wrong me. This is purely business, not pleasure of any kind… We've more in common than you know." The Colonel looked earnestly into his guests eyes.

"We have nothing in common." The warrior spat the word nothing at his opponent as if it could harm him.

"Come now Doctor… you remember how we fought to seal the Medusa Cascade? Watching worlds, galaxies, whole timelines flicker in and out of existence as the rift sealed. The universe ripped to a rainbow of pieces."

"I remember." All too well.

"Remember the dreams we unleashed to entangle the Nightmare Child? Darkness destroyed by hope. And remember when those dreams leaked across Gallifrey?"

The warrior smiled slightly at that. "I remember. Days of hope." He paused, recalling the oasis of happiness. "The children laughed again." There was a brief, shared smile between the men. A momentary oasis of happiness.

"We were on leave… resting. Nothing but black clouds and mud outside And yet… it was the most beautiful day." Their eyes met and they shared not only a brief moment of nostalgia but a smile. But the pleasant sadness in the Colonel's smile soon turned to regret. He took a deep breath. "My apologies again but I really am going to have to kill you until you tell me what the Daleks want to know."

"Well you'll just have to keep killing me then." The warrior's reply was light, almost jocular.

"And then we win either way. Because sooner or later it'll drive you mad. And because there's no escape. Ever. You're going to die every day for the rest of your life."

The warrior chuckled at that. "I've had worse threats. And a lot of better ones." There was a sharp sting in his little toe. One of the rabbits had gnawed through his boot. He kicked it away irritably. There were a lot of rabbits around all of a sudden.

"Made a lot of better ones too if the stories are true."

The Colonel stood up. "They said you'd be stubborn. That it'd be a long job. Anyway, as one of those Earthmen you're so fond of once put it though… we have all the time in the world. Goodbye Doctor… til tomorrow."

The warrior wasn't paying attention to correct the deliberate needling use of his old name. He was futilely trying to fend off a swarm of the rabbits nibbling at his clothes and flesh, slowly working their way through his skin, his organs… it took them a good few hours to nibble the skeleton clean.

He woke.

Same damn place again. He remembered… he remembered the sensation of the laser beam, the sensation of every molecule in his body being instantly separated in time, and what seemed like hundreds of tiny sets of teeth tearing at him, constantly tearing at him…. He remembered…

He remembered dying.

It was new for him. He knew the tiny death of regeneration, had been through it so many times. The fire cleansing every cell, remaking it anew, reinvigorating him. But this was different. There had been the moment that should have triggered the next regeneration and there was… nothing. He'd often wondered how it would feel, the end of his last incarnation. The blankness instead of new life. He knew now. It felt like nothing. Ever. Did that long life, that cheating of the reaper make it better or worse than for humans with their brief lives? He wasn't sure.

Time to go on the offensive. To stop waiting for the man to come to him, or summon him. He had to fight, to maintain at least the illusion of hope. Because without hope there would be nothing. And if he gave up hope, gave in to the nothingness he would betray everything he cared about. Gallifrey. Earth. Billions, trillions of beings who didn't exist yet. He had to resist. However long it took, he had to keep going.

"I know you're there Doctor. You might as well take your seat." The Colonel hadn't even looked round.

The Doctor sat, not bothering to disguise his irritation. "So what's it to be today? Birds with bombs? Worms digging a pit as we speak? Showers of acid?"

The man actually laughed at that. “Inventive Doctor. I’m glad our roles haven’t been reversed.”

“Funnily enough, I’m not.”

“Quite.” The man paused, working up to his futile task. “So tell me… have you changed your mind?”

“You might as well ask the sun not to rise.”

“I can do that here you know.”

“Yes, I’m sure you could. But the answer is the same. No.” The warrior rose. “Well, I’m not sitting around here all day. Better things to do.” He started across the lawn, back toward the house. Behind him, with an atonal crash, the chair he’d just been sitting on was demolished by a grand piano falling out of an empty sky.

The man merely extracted a nail file out and began to file his nails down, despite being mere feet from having been squashed to a pulp.

“You missed.”

A second crash, the atonal noises mixed with the noise of bone crunching and the squelch of blood and organs spraying everywhere.

The man put the nail file away, and delicately dabbed away the blood that had landed on his white suit. “The second one didn’t though”

And so it went on. Day after day after day after day, building into month after month after month after month, building into year after year after year after year building into century after century after century after century… and every day the same conversation. The same questions. The same answers. And every day The Colonel found a new way for him to die. A million different ways.

The custard pie in the face, full of acid.

The mind eating penguins of Voltaria.

A volcano spontaneously erupting beneath him.

The soul sucking succubus of Amdrasia.

Shot into orbit by a sudden spontaneous failure of gravity.

Battered to death by two irate old age pensioners accusing him of ruining the good old days.

Mind eaten by a parasite idea contained in a reality TV programme.

Trampled to death by a confused brontosaurus.

Devoured in the library by sentient books.

But still he refused to divulge the secrets he knew. Earth remained safe and Gallifrey… well who knew how that was faring in his absence?

He woke.

Time to break the pattern. He opened the windows as wide as he could and looked down. Two stories up. Should be enough. He tugged his lapels. Had to be done in style. He climbed up on to the windowsill, spread his arms wide and plummeted to the patio below.

A shadow fell over the splattered remains. “Wondered how long it would take you to try that.” Ah well the man thought, at least it meant a day off.

He woke again, and smiled ruefully. Worth a try anyway.

Ripped limb from limb by a giant purple gorilla.

Eaten by a Venusian fly trap.

Abolished by the Tergiversator of Abalavia.

His second heart developed sentience and ate him from within.

Slipped on a banana skin and hit his head. His last thought this time was that he’d been through this one before.

Asphyxiated by the terminal flatulence of the person in the front end of a pantomime horse. And for an encore farting himself to death the next day.

Tipp-ex toxaemia.

The hand dragging him under the bed, the old nightmare.

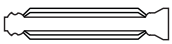
Fell into a vat of shark-infested custard.

Blown up by an exploding cigar.

Fell prey to spontaneous Time Lord combustion.

Kicked to death by Bambi.

On and on. Death after death. Death reduced to mundanity.



He woke

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, ready to face today’s death, He rose, as with every other day…

…and collapsed to the floor as his right leg gave way under his weight. He pushed himself up, rising to a sitting position. His leg was blazing with pain, protesting at being asked to do the job it had always done. It wasn't anything as simple as cramp – he flexed his toes without a problem. But the pain in his calf kept flaring as he moved them. Using the bed for support he slowly rose to his feet, eager to avoid a repeat of his undignified tumble. When he was sure he wouldn't collapse again he tried moving toward the window. He had to drag the leg to make sure he didn't collapse, limp along. It cost him some effort to reach the window, but as he leaned on the frame for support he began to chuckle. This place wasn't perfect after all. Even in his own domain his tormentor wasn't omnipotent. There were loopholes in the rules. He could keep going, trying to work out escape routes or, worst case scenario, hold out for the possibility of rescue. There was hope. He just had to keep going. The laughter carried him through until he was dead again.

And the limp remained, no matter how many times he died. The pain gave the warrior something to hold on to. The strength he needed to endure.

The Colonel and the warrior sat there for their daily conversation. After so long they were almost old friends, despite one being a murderer a million times over and the other his victim. The warrior realised how tedious it must be for the other chap, having nothing to do but find a new way to kill every day. And he realised how irritating it must be for him that, however ingenious and however undignified the deaths got, the Doctor still hadn't given in, to him or to madness.

"Apologies Doctor, but this must be our last conversation."

"So soon? It's only been a few centuries surely."

"I… have my instructions. The Daleks believe me talking to you is keeping you sane."

"They really don't understand me do they? Well what must be must be." He regretfully got up and shook the man's hand as he had when they'd first talked at the table. This time he was instantly electrocuted by a massive charge from the buzzer strapped to the man's palm.

With the conversations stopped the link of common humanity between the two was broken. Slowly, over decades, the deaths became less baroque and more vicious. The man even administered the final touches himself more often, by knife, by machine gun, by grenade. The touch of the absurd disappeared, and without the opportunity to exercise his imagination the man appeared to be going insane himself. Or maybe the static fields in his brain were wearing away and mercury poisoning was driving him mad. Soon it was reduced to a random pattern of shootings and stabbings, but always making sure he could look into his victim's eyes as he killed him. Shootings. Stabbings. Shootings. Stabbings shootingsstabbings shootingsstabbingshootingstabbings again and again and againandag ainandagainandagainandagain… Time began to lose meaning even for the Time Lords, all

that was left for one was viciousness. For the other, only resistance. He could not give in, would not give in. With the increasingly unhinged conduct of the other man he wasn't sure it would matter anymore. There seemed to be a perverse, crazed delight now, any air of regret long evaporated.

He could not see the weeping of the man after each murder. A man seeming to sense his humanity eroding away with each day of his job, but wanting to live too much to take an easy way out. The Daleks hadn't just designed this place as a torture chamber for one Time Lord.

Shooting.

Stabbing.

Shooting.

Stabbing.

Shooting.

Stabbing.

Stabbing.

Stabbing.

Stabbing.

Stabbing.

On and on, with time losing all meaning. And then one day it ended.

The end began in a sudden sizzle of dazzling blue light that scorched a large part of the previously immaculate lawn black. Two human sized whirlwinds stood there.

"Detectors show one life form, located inside the house. Regeneration suppression field in effect."

"Temporal armour remains on until we've determined intentions. No-one's going to have missed that entrance, so stealth's pointless." The Madame cursed the inefficiency of the technicians, materialising them right in front of the bloody place. "Keep your sensors on." Her fellow soldier only nodded in response. The pair walked towards the house, their feet crunching on the gravel driveway. No point in wasting unnecessary energy and their scans hadn't detected any unusual weapons. They passed the table, set as ever these days with only one seat.

The huge main doors weren't locked. Given there was only one life form in this whole place that was hardly surprising. It had been so out of the way, so hidden that mundane security like that didn't matter. They found the man in a downstairs room, gazing into the distance and perfectly still aside from his hands which endlessly played with a vicious looking knife. He didn't notice their presence even as they stunned him then

trussed him up.

"This is too easy Madame."

The trooper was right. It surely had to be harder than this. There's something here that the Daleks didn't want the Time Lords getting their hands on, so why leave what seemed like an idiot in charge?

"You keep an eye on him, I'll search the place. Don't communicate with him, not one word, not a single acknowledgement of his presence." She left the room, slowly and cautiously exploring every room. Wary of the traps that must surely be present. But she found no traps.

She was a five millennia, four incarnation veteran of the War. She'd seen things more terrible than she imagined, planets winked out of existence, races wiped from history, temporal mines that mangled past present and future selves into one eternal moment of existence and making monsters out of people. But this place had a sense of slaughter that the Time War rarely had.

She was halfway through scoping out the first floor, in the middle of what appeared to be a ballroom, when she noticed the bleeping. Right in the middle of a wide open space, she cursed at being caught in such a vulnerable spot when she realised the bleeping came from her sensors. She checked the heads up display, flicking through the data simply with the motion of her eyes. She still almost missed it.

Another life form.

Bloody Daleks. Some creature of theirs they'd left in a time lock, ready to be unleashed when disturbed. She hoped it wasn't a Slyther. Those bastards were hard to get rid of. Analysis in… Humanoid. Not a Slyther then, or one of those Varga plant beasts… good. Bicardiac, artron signature… Time Lord? Another one? They were the only ones due here, not even the CIA knew about this place…

It appeared to be on the floor above her. Swiftly but carefully she exited the ballroom and lightly made her way up the stairs. There. That room over there. No chances, take the thing by surprise…

He woke. And he waited.

No point in going anywhere. His murderer would be along soon. And, as he always did now, he simply put his hands behind his head and whistled a jaunty tune he'd picked up on Earth.

He was a touch surprised when the door was unceremoniously booted in and a shifting whirlwind appeared in front of him. The chap hadn't shown the remotest scintilla of imagination in a few hundred years. And he'd got dressed up in temporal armour. How kind of him. Maybe he wasn't quite as mad as he appeared to be going.

"About time! Well then, get on with it!" He closed his eyes flung his arms open, waiting for the pain and the oblivion once more. When nothing happened, he cranked one eye open again. "Well?"

The whirlwind vanished and a sharp-faced middle-aged woman in combat fatigues stood in front of him.

"Well this is a pleasant change."

The Madame frowned. "I know you."

"Do you? Pleased to meet you again then."

"No, I know your face…" While she struggled to place it (damn memory, bodies wore out so fast these days!) she cross checked it in her database. It returned one answer. One impossible answer.

"Name?" Make sure it was him.

"I'm not sure these days… but I used to be called The Doctor."

"It can't be. You were killed on Abvarius… they faked an offer of peace and obliterated the planet."

"They wiped out a planet just to conceal my whereabouts? I'd be flattered if it wasn't so monstrous."

"And you've been here? With just the drooling idiot downstairs for company?"

"It's a long story… but enough about me. How is the War going after all this time? Does Gallifrey still stand?"

The Madame laughed. "Ever the egotist. Just because you've been gone for a few short weeks we haven't completely gone to pieces you know."

"Weeks?" The warrior laughed, brief and short. All those years of resistance and the outside universe hadn't even paused for breath in his absence. Healthy for the ego if nothing else. "I take it you're my rescue party?"

"Well I am now." She transmitted the rescue signal to the mothership. "Let's take you home…" One flash of blue light later and the room was still. A few seconds later, with the animating will of its owner now absent, the whole dimension compacted to the size of an atom before popping out of existence altogether.

The warrior's feet clanged irregularly on the metal of the ship's floor. He wished they'd put some carpet down on these damn things, they were murder on the knees and agony on his still painful calf. He entered the holding area and sank down wearily on to the bench in front of the only occupied cell. The Time Lords liked their prisoners a long way away from them, gave them time to react if they detected an escape.

"Morning."

The man in the cell looked up. “Is it?”

“We’re in the vortex. It’s always morning. And afternoon, evening and night. But we always talked in the morning.”

“Before I killed you.”

“Yes.”

“Are you going to kill me?” asked the prisoner.

There was a long silence. And then the warrior replied: “Did you learn nothing?”

“Learn? From what?”

“If I have to answer that for you the question’s redundant, wouldn’t you say?”

“No.”

The Doctor laughed heartily at that one. “I suppose you’re right. I’ve been in the company of Time Lords too long acting like that. But still…” He mused for a few seconds, choosing his words carefully. “There was a man on Earth. Sol Three. He was fighting an empire. And he chose not to respond to their cruelty with force. He fought back with kindness and doing nothing.”

“You never fought.”

“Ah, you still don’t understand. A war isn’t always waged with weapons. I fought.“

“You didn’t. You just stood there and died.”

There was sadness in the Doctor’s gaze. “I just wasn’t fighting for what you thought I was fighting for.”

“Which was?”

“You.”

“How poetic.”

“Well what was death to me? An afternoon nap. What was the point in retaliation? In perpetuating the violence? I’ve seen what happens.”

The man just stared. After a long look into the silver eyes the Doctor sighed and limped away, leaving him in his cell.

“Well?” The Doctor made the Madame wait for an answer. He was in the captain’s room, her domain. It was important not to cede any initiative.

“He’s not talking.”

“Thought not. Well we’ve got enough evidence on him. A murderer at least a million times over.”

"I won't testify."

"Won't you?"

"No. Whatever you do to him can't compare with what the Daleks have done to him."

"Spare me your liberal nonsense. This is war."

"And with that we're no better than they are. They win. We lose sight of what we're fighting for."

The Madame simply rolled her eyes. "Oh, *please*. A captured Dalek agent? The chance for this sort of information doesn't come up too often."

"He knows nothing. I talked to him for millennia. He's just a pawn and you know how little the Daleks care for their pawns. And he's one of our own for Rass-" He broke off, disgusted. Was this what Gallifrey had become in his absence? This desperate? "What about rehabilitation? Second chances?"

"What about them?"

"We used to know the meaning of mercy. Now we just know the meaning of war."

The Madame paused, considering. "Very well Doctor. I'll have the Castellan consider your request for clemency."

They locked gazes, the Madame's cool and the Doctor's suspicious. She raised one eyebrow, questioning him and he broke eye contact, realising this was the only concession he was likely to extract. He left the room without glancing back.

The Madame waited until the door slid to and the Doctor was beyond hearing range. Having him back was a coup, one of serendipitous timing. The tide of the war had flowed against them of late and the Doctor's return would galvanise the beleaguered people. They needed him. It wouldn't do to upset him over one insignificant Dalek agent. Not openly anyway. She got up, and strode decisively on to the flight deck.

"Lieutenant, open a comms channel to Gallifrey please, to the Castellan. Tell him hope has returned. And tell him…" She licked her lips. "Tell him to prepare the Mind Probe. We've got something for him to work on."

Help a Stranded Time Traveller

by Matthew Sylvester

Time And Relative Dimension In Space. TARDIS. Five glorious words, five glorious letters. Five wonderful ways of making an absolute fortune for right the person. If you knew the right buyer.

Buyer. Another five letters. Another word that had so much meaning behind it. So much money. So much *fear*. Sweaty palms, dry mouth, stomach twisting itself in painful knots, the ever present need to pee…

Every monster starts off as someone's baby. However, the seller found it very hard to believe that *his* buyer, and the species from which his buyer hailed, ever even had a mother! From what he had heard, he doubted that they ever even been babies...

All he had to do in order to stay alive was succeed. His buyer had been very clear. "Find the TARDIS. Deliver it to us. Fail and die."

The life of security guard is one of absolute tedium, lightened only by staff discounts, cheap food and a good collection of books and hooky films to get through the night shift. Some guards use the quiet time to improve their lives, studying to get qualifications that they hadn't at school. Others drift through their shifts in much the same way as they drift through their lives.

Dave Jonas was one such guard. As he walked he scratched at his ample arse, sighing about how much weight he had put on as he slowly munched on a snickers, rolling the chunky peanut pieces aside from the caramel, swallowing the caramel first and then crunching the peanuts.

Check door 15, locked, three paces, check door 17, locked, check door 19. *Wait. What?* He was new to this building, but was sure that he had been told that there were only 17 rooms on this floor.

He reached for the handle, gave it a gentle turn. His hair ruffled as air hissed from the gap the opening door made. It was stale. Dry.

Stepping through he took two steps before stopping, his jaw opening at he sight

before him. “What the f...?” The sound of the door slamming cut him off. He spun. *No door! Where’s the door?* Spinning, he looked at the grass plain surrounding him, a soft wind causing it to ripple in waves. It would have been quite beautiful if he hadn’t been so scared.

“Report.” The buyer’s voice grated on his ears. The ever-present threat and gunstick grated on his nerves. It didn’t help that he was surrounded by potential buyers, all of whom viewed him as something less than excreta on their shoes. If they’d worn shoes that was. He thought he was probably overestimating the esteem in which they didn’t hold him.

“I’ve located the article sir. I shall be attempting to enter it shortly. Once successful I shall send you the co-ordinates.” He wiped sweaty palms on his trousers, tongue running over his lips. *Can they smell fear?*

“Leave us. Report in 24 hours.”

James Turton hated his job. Hell, if he was honest he pretty much hated his life. Stuck on a permanent night shift after his last written warning, he arrived at work in the dark and left in the dimpsy light that most people never saw. None of this was his fault mind. If Sharon hadn’t led him on at the Christmas party, he wouldn’t have sent those emails. Or the texts. Or called her in the evening. *How was I supposed to know she had a boyfriend?*

Most of all however, he hated cleaners. Cleaners hated cleaning. It was obvious. Every time he ate a Danish and didn’t clean up the flakes from the carpet they moaned to his bitch of a line manager, Jill. They never cleaned the desks either. Once he had deliberately smeared peanut butter across the edge of the desk. It had taken three days before he gave up and cleaned it up himself. That and the fact that Kevin had complained about the mess.

They were shit at cleaning up the shit in the toilets. He sighed as he moved from cubicle to cubicle, clegs, streaks and stains all forcing him to move on.

He was clenching hard by the time he reached the last one. *Bloody curry was too spicy. I should never have gone for that damn challenge!*

Practically kicking the door open he barged in, looking down to fumble with his belt, dropping his trousers and pants before he looked up.

The jungle before him was vibrant, full of life, blood-red leaves hanging from bile-green branches. It was like nothing that he had ever seen. It was also like nothing he would ever see again, the Venus flycatcher clamping hard on his head before he could draw breath to scream.

Tramps are like ninjas. They move through a crowd as if Moses had parted had parted it himself. No-one gives a tramp a second glance unless they think they're going to be approached. As long as the tramp sits still, or doesn't speak to anyone they're invisible. *Persona non grata.*

He hated that. Humans, in all their wondrous glory, their constant striving against fate were shallow. They were cruel. How they could ignore, shun the very people that needed their help was behind him. And yet he still loved them. He loved every fault. He loved everything host was good about them too.

Which is why he put up with the lice, the stink and the insults. Which is why he would always return to put his life on the line for them.

When people go missing, they either want to disappear, someone wants them to disappear, or they wander into something that they shouldn't.

If people who work in the same building go missing, one after the other, it's fairly safe assume that they haven't eloped. When they go missing in a building that has groaning pipes, you can be certain that something out of the ordinary is happening.

He didn't like things that happened out of the ordinary, especially not now, not when the very fabric of the universe was threatened. Not when the glorious humans were threatened.

Looking down at the cup in front of him he picked it up, tipped the coins inside into his hand and slipped them into his pocket. *Time to go to work.*

Standing up he took an unsteady step forward and bumped straight into a well-dressed man. "Oh, I *am* sorry sir, hope I didn't make you dirty." He brushed at the man, patting him all over as he tried to wipe away the imaginary dirt.

"I'm fine. Piss off will you!" A hard shove accompanied the words and the man strode hurriedly away, not noticing that his pocket was lighter than it should have been.

The atrium was typical of so-called 21at century decor; wide open space, random plants that no-one could be sure were real or not, a long reception desk and a relatively attractive receptionist who smiled blandly at everyone who caught her eye.

"Detective Allen. I'm here as part of the missing persons case. I believe that they both worked on floor thirteen?" The seller flipped open his wallet, showing the blank paper inside it to the receptionist sat behind the black marble covered desk.

"Of course Detective. If you could just sign the guest book. Do you need someone to show you?" She smiled in the vacant way that he loved, seeing what he wanted her to see, wanting to please him. She continued to smile as he signed the book, Sweeney Todd being his favourite

"No thank you. I'll be perfectly fine." He passed her the guest book, straightened his tie and strode to the elevators.

The Seller's breath caught in his chest as he stepped out onto floor 13. He could sense his prey close by. There was a wrongness in the air that only someone as sensitive as he could truly appreciate. Closing his eyes he walked along the corridor, trailing his fingers along the wall, feeling out his prey.

"There you are." He smiled as he opened eyes and looked at the door before him. He took a deep breath, muttered a prayer that probably wouldn't help, opened the door and stepped through.

"Oh my. Aren't you a beautiful girl?" He stood in the control room of the TARDIS. Granted, beautiful wasn't a word that most people would use when looking at the battle-scarred interior. The plasma-burned skeleton that was fused to one part of the console certainly didn't match the word in any sense, but to him she was beautiful.

"My buyers are going to be *very* happy with you. Oh yes." He reached out and flicked a switch on the console, reading the flickering lights that answered as easily as if they were words in a book. "Very happy indeed." Her data drives were still intact, the now dead crew unable to destroy them before they were killed. *I'm rich.*

Rubbing his hands as he licked his lips, he rolled his shoulders and started to move around the console, flicking switches, pulling levers, bringing the TARDIS back to life and finally entering the co-ordinates that the buyers had given him. All that remained was for him to pull one more switch and they would be off.

"I think you'll find that doesn't belong to you." The Seller squeaked at the softly spoken voice, his heart hammering fit to burst.

He spun, drawing a dissembler blaster from its hidden holster in one smooth move. The unexpected sight of the craggy-faced tramp in a much worn leather jacket held him from pulling the trigger. "Who the bloody hell *are* you?" His nose wrinkled, he couldn't tell what the tramp smelt of, but it was so pungent it felt as if his nasal hairs were being singed away.

"Who am I? *Who a*m I? Why, I'm me. A somewhat tired me if I'm honest. I'm also a slightly annoyed me. I'd prefer it if you kept me at that. You don't want to see a very annoyed, or even angry me." The old tramp's eyes wandered around, dancing across the damaged console, the melted walls. "She was beautiful at one point."

The Seller realised that his mouth was hanging open and that somehow he had lost control of the situation. After all, it was *he* who was holding the tramp at gunpoint, not the other way round. If so why was his stomach knotting so?

"Look you old fart, I'm with the police," he fumbled out his wallet and flashed the paper, "on official business. So, why don't you piss off and let me deal with this?"

The tramp gave a soft laugh, so soft and short that it resembled a cough more. "Ah,

you're a seller. To whom I wonder. I knew her people you know. They were lovely. Low-born Gallifreyans. Caste used to mean something. Not any more of course. They need everyone they have."

The tramp moved faster than he could have believed. One second he was a few feet away. The next there was the whine of a sonic screwdriver, his pistol heating so suddenly he screamed and dropped it in shock, pain flaring in his hand, and then there was a bright flash of light and he found himself lying on the floor, the tramp kneeling on his chest.

"Sorry about that. I simply can't abide having guns pointed at me. Seems that people are always doing that. Enemies, friends, those people in the middle who you can never tell whether you like them or not. All of them seem to think that it's okay to point guns at me."

The Seller tried to speak, but found his jaw wouldn't move properly. *He hit me. The old bastard hit me.* He tried to shift his weight, preparing to throw the old man off his chest. The tramp hit him lightly, twice. Both strikes caught nerve clusters, robbing him of his strength and flooding his system with pain.

"Stay still please. I don't want to have to kill you just now. It leaves stains you see." The tramp brushed at the many stains on his coat, "You can clean clothes but the soul is another matter. You can't clean the soul no matter how many kittens you save from a fire. Good deeds don't absolve sins, they just plaster over the cracks."

The Seller could only groan, the weight of the tramp slowly compressing his chest, making it harder and harder to breathe, his vision growing dimmer.

The sonic screwdriver whined again, the tone changing into a warble. "Cleansing protocol commenced. All data will be cleansed in five minutes. Final co-ordinates accepted."

The Seller twisted his head, eyes widening as he saw the central column start to rise and fall.

The tramp leaned in, his breath tickling the Seller's ear as he spoke. "I've changed my mind. You can have this TARDIS. I've even arranged for your buyers to meet you. I believe that you dropped this." There was a gentle thud as the tramp dropped the Seller's locator onto his chest. "Do say hello to them won't you. Sleep well."

Still trying to breathe, the Seller barely had time to see the tramp's hand chop down at the side of his throat before everything went suddenly black.

Coffee. Tea. Vodka. Of the three coffee had to be one of the best drinks on the planet. Not only did it warm the soul on a dreary and drizzly day, but the cups that it came in made handy receptacles for coins. People would walk past him, look at his cardboard sign and chuckle before dropping them into the cup.

He took a sip from the fresh coffee in his hand and nodded his thanks as a young woman walked over and dropped a pound into the cup, smiling at the sign propped up in

front of him.

“Help a stranded time traveller?” it said.

Storage Wars

by Paul Driscoll

"Tea. Must find some tea" The Doctor muttered as he manoeuvred his way through the bustling crowds of central London. Limping and cursing past what he called the over hyped and over roasted ceremonial coffee houses. He made his way to the oldest purveyor of tea in Covent Garden. Not the East Indian Trading Company, but the City Mission Hall. A curious mix of sandwich and sermons, hot beverages and Bible awaited those who were desperate enough for a free lunch. A meeting point for London's waifs and strays, or to his mind, the true prophets and priests.

Underneath the arches in the East End, Samuel Stockton's pristine shoes would probably not be picked up on camera, but nonetheless he always carried polish in the inside pocket of his silk waistcoat. He felt that it gave him an advantage over his competitors on the reality show *Storage Wars*. He was about to give the blemish removal treatment to a tiny speck of bird crap on his left shoe when the cameras started rolling. The next bounty-laden transporter pulled into view, its excessively squeaky brakes deliberately tampered with for effect. The auctioneer spoke through the megaphone as his female assistant began to break the locks on the truck with a huge pair of cutters. "And now for lot number 4. This collection of lost treasures hails from an old scrap yard in Shoreditch. As usual, you beautiful guys and girls get 60 seconds to look around the contents of the truck, but the one rule is - no touching."

Inside the mission hall, the Doctor made his way to his preferred table, greeted by a few grunts of "Alright Smithy."

Before he got there however, Reverend Jones, one of the chaplains, stepped in front of him.

"We were wondering, Mr.Smith," the Reverend began. "If you would perhaps care to join us in a small prayer service we're hav – "

A broad Scottish voice piped-up from across the room, cutting the Reverend off.

"Smithy! Come on over here and sit down. I've set the chess game up." It was Bill. A war veteran who had been sleeping rough since returning from the Falklands, he was one

of the reasons why the Doctor persisted in coming here. That, and the excellent of cups of English tea from Mrs Hemsley which, when mixed with the contents from the Doctors secret hipflask, tasted absolutely divine…

"My apologies Reverend Jones," said the Doctor. "The games awaits. But I'm sure we will have the opportunity to speak again"

The Doctor patted the Reverend on the arm and walked over to Bills table. He was slightly dismayed, however, to see there was someone else sitting there too.

It was Ruby, a young woman who had recently taken to coming to the City Mission a few times a week and sit and talk to the regulars. Nobody knew why she, a young, well-dressed attractive, foreign-looking girl with a very posh accent chose to come here. But as was the custom, nobody asked.

"Smithy!" she said, smiling broadly. "You and Bill are going to show me how to play chess!"

The Doctor and Bill exchanged a look.

"We're going to need a lot of tea." The Doctor said.

Samuel Stockton was alone in his living room, still furious. He had won the Totters Lane Lot months ago. Now it was the day of broadcast, and he had no idea how the episode would be edited. He had made a terrible loss but had blagged his way through as many sales as possible.

As the opening credits rolled, he picked up a strange ornate box, no bigger than a Rubik's cube, and squished an ant crawling along its rough surface. It was the one remaining item from the lot, decorative but completely worthless according to the antique dealers. Knowing the program was due today, Stockton had relisted it for a 24 hour auction on *eBid*, due to end just two hours after the show had aired. The description "as seen in the hit TV series *Storage Wars*" would hopefully up its value. So far not one bid.

The usual arguments about the communal TV were raging in the Mission Hall. Bill, befitting his top dog status, was flicking through the channels when the Doctor suddenly grabbed the remote from him. On screen, the doors of the *Storage Wars* container had opened to reveal a hauntingly familiar collection of items, including a broken sign – 'Totters Lane Junkyard'.

"Be quiet all of you!" he shouted. "In the name of sanity, shut up!"

The crowded hall duly obliged; even the more boisterous drunk members were silenced. Mrs Hemsley quickly turned off the boiling urn. Most eyes were now glued to the screen, curious as to what could possibly have provoked such an enraged cry, but Bill looked intently at Smithy. Though cantankerous and moody, Smithy was always soft-

spoken and polite. He had never seen him like this. Was that a tear he had detected in the corner of Smithy's eye? It suddenly dawned on Bill that whilst he had shared his innermost secrets about his past with his friend, he in turn knew absolutely nothing about the man.

"Is that one of your old haunts Smithy?" asked Ruby, motioning to the screen. "Totters Yard?"

"I stayed there a while, Ruby." He replied. "But it was a very long time ago. I was a young runaway. I felt safe there."

His attention suddenly snapped back to the screen and started shouting at it angrily.

"No, not that wretched clown face! It is completely without value. And *that*! That won't do either. Only a hopeless romantic could possibly be interested in that monstrosity!"

The programme broke for a commercial and Ruby noticed Smithy take a swig from a silver hipflask. No one else saw.

Stockton gestured at the TV screen, angry that his very clever sale of the Clown's mask at the Coal Hill School car boot sale had been cut. The school governor had paid a very generous amount and Stockton hoped his act of generosity would put him in a good light with the skeptical viewers. He glanced down at his laptop. Still no bids. But now the mysterious item was about to be revealed to the nation. It struck Stockton that a signed item might be of even greater value, so after testing out a sharpie pen on his arm, he signed one face of the box. "That's odd. Can't have pressed hard enough" he said, trying again. No matter how much pressure he applied, the signature repeatedly faded away to nothing. Tentatively he put one finger onto the box for a matter of seconds, but quickly jolted his hand back.

"What the hell?"

Just for a few seconds, Stockton could see right through his finger…

"Did you spot the tear?" whispered Bill to Ruby. "Something's upset Smith alright. That old scrap on the telly. Maybe it belonged to him?"

"There's more to that man than meets the eye, Bill." she replied. "But I don't think that tear was for the scrap yard. It was for his home. Haven't you ever wondered why he's so keen to hear about your experiences on the frontline? Or why you feel so free to talk to him about those things you've buried for years? I've seen his type before. He is a wounded healer, Bill. A wounded healer… but he dare not admit it."

"Enough of the psychobabble, Ruby Tuesday." drawled Bill. "Why are you so interested in Smithy anyway?"

"I'm interested in people, that's all." Ruby replied.

"Maybe you like an older man!" said Bill with a wink and a leer.

But Ruby had stopped listening. She was watching Smithy, who had walked away from the table to stand immediately in front of the TV screen, brow furrowed in intense concentration. She went over to join him.

"That shouldn't be there. I wonder…" he mumbled. There, on the screen, was Stockton's mysterious box in close up, with a legend beside it stating "value unknown."

The Doctor turned up the volume as Stockton was being interviewed. *"I have absolutely no idea what this is, but my last hope in making a profit on this lot rests on this little beauty. I've taken it for valuation but the antiques dealers cannot value it or even date it. It's a complete one-off, apparently. I tried the local museum but they couldn't find a historical period to exhibit it in, so for now I'm stuck with it. I could send it off for a carbon dating test, but hell, I'm not a bloody archaeologist….. I just need to make the cash."*

As the credits rolled, the soothing voice of the female narrator summed up the day's work: *"Sammy eventually decided to put up the mysterious box for auction on* eBid*, but all in all Totters Lane proved to be Totters Tat and the box failed to meet its low reserve."*

Stockon was livid. He threw his brandy glass, smashing it to pieces against the wall. He shouted at the screen

"Come on, it's up again live on the site now, someone please search it. Mysterious Box – that's the keyword, come on, come on – you were supposed to big it up, tell the viewer 'it remains unsold but is possibly worth a fortune.'"

He was only slightly appeased by seeing himself onscreen winking and pointing to the *eBid* username emblazoned on his cap…

"*Gravytown*" the Doctor noted. He called over to Reverend Jones.

"I need a computer now," he said urgently.

In the main admin office, the Doctor and Reverend Jones sat side by side at a small desk in front of a laptop. The Doctor would have rather been alone to do this, but the Reverend had insisted. It was hard enough persuading the clergyman to let him, Smithy, an elderly derelict, use a computer in the first place. The City Mission had had problems with that in the past.

"Tell me, Reverend," the Doctor said, typing at high speed on the keyboard "what does this charity need? What do all charities need more than anything else?"

"Where to begin?" the priest sighed. "Well first of all there's the –"

"There you go" said the Doctor, "£150,000 provisionally awarded to the Covent Garden Mission Hall."

"What? How?"

"Not only that, Reverend," the Doctor continued "but your systems now have a program that is guaranteed to bring you the funds. Automatically scanning for funding sources, it completes your application by pre-filling the forms, using all the preferred keywords and information available to give a 99% chance of success."

The Reverend was speechless.

"Think of it as a 'thank you' for all the years of tea and for not bothering me too much with your superstitious voodoo" said the Doctor "Now perhaps I can use the computer for my own pleasure? And maybe now your staff can spend less time on administration, and more time listening to those people out there? You might learn something from them. I believe your latest completed applications are already winging their way to all the relevant funding sources and philanthropists as we speak. Now: off you jolly well trot."

The Reverend staggered out of the room as if in a trance, completely missing Ruby who was standing, arms folded, in the doorway.

"That box, Smithy," she said "What was so special about it?"

The Doctor, head down, ignored the question

"So I just click on *eBid*…" he mumbled. "there, now… How does it work? World Wide Web. Let me see..."

The Doctor typed in the search box: ***Gravytown please can I bid for that mysterious box?***

"No results! What on earth does that mean?"

Banging the table in irritation he finally turned to acknowledge Ruby

"Ruby?" he said. "What does it mean '*no results found*'? And look! Why does it keep crossing out the words in the middle of my question?"

Tenderly, Ruby sat beside him, holding his shaky hand over the mouse.

"Smithy. You just set up a program worth millions of pounds to the little charities and you don't know how to use *eBid*?" she asked. Smithy shrugged. "Let me take you through the basics, ok? First you need an account name… How about *TheDocSmith*? You know, like a play on *locksmith*?"

"No" he replied. "Something else."

"Right then, *CaptainGrumpy* it is, then!" said Ruby.

An hour had passed since the end of the show, and Stockton was starting to doze-

off after too many brandies. A ping alerted him to a notification on *eBid*. With just a few minutes to go, finally a bid: £3,000. Stockton, shook off the brandy and tested the waters.

"Ok, *CaptainGrumpy*. I'll raise you £3,010. And a penny for luck."

"Where are you going to get £3,000 from, Smithy? You should have started with a tenner, you know? Bartered up gradually from there. I thought I explained it?"

"I have to buy that item Ruby, whatever it takes." Said the Doctor.

It took precisely an extra £3,000 and two pence by the time the crazy bidding war between Stockton and the Doctor had ended.

For once, Stockton had reason to be cheerful.

"Well goodbye little magic box." He said to the box, pressing it against a spider that was crawling along the wall, making it disappear "I could kiss you, but my might lips fall off. Heh heh. I don't know what you are, but I know what six grand is. Cash on collection. Bloody marvellous."

The next day, under the darkness of the early November evening, the Doctor made his way by bus and foot, limping all the way, to the address *GravyTown* had sent via email. He carried a small rucksack in which, in little bags, was the £6,000 the seller wanted. Once upon a time, he could have just gone there with the TARDIS and stolen the box. But any TARDIS travel would alert his people *and* his enemies, and put the Earth at risk. Plus, he wasn't sure he was entirely ready yet. The limp and the fragility were the physical reminders. The mental scars went much deeper. The hate ran deeper still…

His mind wandered to those days when he and Susan had set up camp in Totters Lane. That tiny box was Susan's pride and joy back on Gallifrey and one of the few possessions she insisted came with her in the TARDIS. It was her personal connection to the home they had hastily abandoned. And now- countless centuries later - it was a reminder of life *before* the War. A reminder of being a Father and a Grandfather. He was neither of those anymore.

An image of young Susan – seven or eight years old - clutching the box and running gleefully across red Gallifreyan fields, chasing rabbits and humming along with the Galimites as the little insects fluttered above the long grass. (*"Grandfather, look at callimites!" "Galimites, child. Galimites."*)

Grasping the straps on the rucksack, instinctively handling them like lapels, he spoke aloud.

"My dear, dear Susan" he said. "If you could see me now…"

In front of him, a figure emerged from a side alley. Used to London and its ways, years spent on the streets, senses attuned to the transactions of violence, the Doctor steeled himself.

He didn't have a chance.

The figure knocked him unconscious with a violent blow to the back of the head. He crouched down and removed the rucksack then tied the Doctor's hands. Turning the body around and checking his pulse, the man whispered in a familiar Scottish accent

"I'm sorry Smithy." said Bill. "Needs must, and you can't have been one of us. Not really. Not with all this cash in hand."

A black, hotwired Ford Orion pulled up, and Bill shuffled Smithy's limp body into the back and sat beside him.

He pulled the door closed.

"So where are we doing to drop him? We could have just left him here you know?" But as Bill turned to face the driver he found himself looking down the barrel of a gun.

"I'm sorry Bill, but it's *you* we're leaving here. Get out of the car or I'll blow your head off," said Ruby.

Bill froze, suddenly back in the Falklands where he had last felt that close to death.

She took the rucksack and threw him a tenner.

"Here you go - go treat yourself to a burger and chips… or even a couple of litres of cider. Go on, have a day to remember."

The good soldier followed orders and left the car. Ruby looked at the unconscious, slumped figure of the Doctor in her rear view mirror

"So then, Doctor," she said. "Let's go and retrieve this mysterious box. We need it more than you could know."

It was several hours before the Doctor finally came to. Fighting the disorientation, he began to piece together his unfamiliar surroundings. In semi-darkness tied to a wooden chair with a coffee table just out of reach, the Doctor reasoned he was in some kind of lock up. On the table was the mysterious box. It triggered the memory of Susan first receiving it as a gift on Gallifrey, the joy in her face at its possibilities and her impatience to start using it.

"*To my dear Susan, may it bring you joy, and nurture curiosity...*" Ruby, stepping out of the shadows, read aloud the words the Doctor had written on the box, a very, very long time ago. "Ancient Gallifreyan, a language the time war has so nearly forgotten. Come on Doctor… say it with me, speak the words you long to hear."

"I don't know who you are, but I do know this" he said, grimly. "I will never answer

to that name. What do you want from the box?"

"It's not what I want from it, it's what I want to put inside it!"

The Doctor remembered Susan catching two Galimites, once prevalent on Gallifrey, from the woods outside her family home, coming back excited. How he had taught her the technique and code to open the box and how they had watched as the two flying insects made their way inside it. Galimites, dragonflies, with the most vibrant of colours flittering around with joy and abandon over silver streams, radiating peace and well being with their most beautiful of melodies.

"A Galimite box. How quaint, Doctor."

"How did you know? Even if you are from Gallifrey – which is appears you are - your eyes look too young to remember an ancient child's toy."

"We've been scanning for Time Lord Technology" she said "That's how I found you. I've been asked to bring you back. We need you, Doctor, and I've been assigned the task of finding you. And then two nights ago, watching that pathetic Earth entertainment show, I knew that the box was somehow connected to you. I scanned the box and its functions were revealed. Bigger on the inside than the out, a whole ecosystem within which to breed Galimites… how very resourceful. And how adorable that the Grandfather should want it as a keepsake. Such a shame that the Galimites died out centuries ago."

"So what is it to you then, Ruby?"

"Alright, enough of the cloak and dagger. We're on the same side. I have something to show you."

Ruby untied the Doctor. Pressing her gun to his back, she gave him the box and turned on the lights, revealing a battered crate behind them.

"Your TARDIS?" the Doctor asked.

Ruby opened the door. Inside was a huge, blue-lit, high ceilinged laboratory

"Adapted Battle TARDIS" she said. "Served as a hospital on the front lines."

She ushered him into the lab. The Doctor noticed that one wall was filled with photographs and notes, coordinates and clues as to his whereabouts. The rest of the lab walls were filled with shelves housing cages of various live mutated creatures, all kinds of shapes and sizes. The Doctor recoiled

"What is all this? What have you been doing?" he said, shocked.

Ruby picked up a container within which two angry bugs were wrestling to escape. "Meet the Dalekmites, Doctor. Mutated from the Galimite, they have proven highly efficient in detecting, disabling and destroying Daleks. These are the secret weapons of war, undetectable by Dalek comms systems and especially effective in taking down hoverboard Daleks."

"So that's what happened to the Galimites! They didn't become extinct by natural

means. You went back in time and butchered then! Genetically modified them!"

"They were low forms of life that served no discernible purpose other than to entertain or charm, and were considered, by many, as pests. Now they have been adapted into the perfect killing machines. Attracted to the scent of a Dalek, we altered them so their 'humming' wrecks havoc on a Dalek's navigation system and internal life-support, and, ultimately, destroys them."

"So why do you need the breeding box?" the Doctor said. "You have your creatures?"

"These are the last two Doctor, we've simply run out, and it seems that the conditions in which to breed are no longer possible on Gallifrey's barren wastelands. If the Galimite Box is still functioning it could contain the perfect habitat to kick start their procreation."

"Do I have a choice?" scoffed the Doctor indicating the gun pointed at him. "Didn't you stop for one minute to think that by wiping out a species you actually created untold damage to the environment? The Galimites were there for a reason, and in point of fact, giving pleasure should be reason enough. How much more valued would they have been, in these days of death and destruction?"

The Doctor began to stroke the box, feeling its braille-like indentations and whispering his old nickname for dearest Susan. As the box opened a melody of thousands upon thousands of voices in harmony could be heard. The Doctor fumbled around in his coat pockets and pulled out a bar of Kendal Mint Cake. Discarding the wrapper, he waved the sweet in front of the box before launching it to the other side of the room. One by one the Galimites emerged from the box, fluttering freely around the room, perching here, there and everywhere and singing their sweet songs.

"I don't believe it," said Ruby, wide-eyed but the Doctor was ecstatic

"Fifty years of breeding in a box in a junkyard in London." He called. "The Galimites are back from the dead! Listen to them. Listen and let them sooth our troubled souls, just for one night."

The room gradually filled with the creatures. Ruby moved to release her imprisoned Dalekmites in a vain attempt to crossbreed them

"Doctor," she called, "Every one of them could destroy a whole platoon of Daleks! Think about the lives they could save!"

"You have already wiped the species out once. I won't let it happen again," The Doctor said, walking backwards, out of the lab, out of Rubys TARDIS. He caressed the box and whistled a tune, a hymn whose politically corrected words did little to appease his annoyance when he had suffered the ignominy of listening to it in the mission hall; *All Things Bright and Beautiful.*

The cloud of Galimites gathered and made their way back inside the breeding box. The two Dalekmites seemed unmoved, going against the flow back towards the laboratory.

"The Galimites in their castle, the Dalekmites at the gate" whispered the Doctor.

Ruby screamed in vain “Come on follow them in”. With the Galimites returning to their natural habitat the room cleared and Ruby quickly adjusted her plan. Grabbing the rucksack she had stolen from the Doctor, she attempted to catch as many Galimites as possible.

The Doctor roared with laughter at her

“I’m afraid Ruby, I will never open this box again in your presence. These creatures should be left to be themselves and not turned into instruments of war. They’re a part of the old Gallifrey. Perhaps they’re all that we have left, untouched from before the war.”

Ruby placed the rucksack in the laboratory, keeping her gun-sight fixed on the Doctor.

“Give me the box, Doctor. It’s either you or the box I’ll be taking with me. If you won’t open it, I’ll have to find someone else who can, and you know who that means don’t you… *Granddad*?”

The Doctor grimly tossed the Galimite box to Ruby. “Oh Ruby, did you not stop to consider why your two mutant bugs didn’t join in with the party and dance to the same tune?”

It was hopeless, he thought. She was clearly not going to listen –Turning to leave, he continued “or why out of all the bugs in this room you happen to just catch itsy and bitsy?”

Inside the laboratory the rucksack was shaking violently, the two increasingly agitated Dalekmites emitting a shrill sound familiar to Ruby from the battlefield. Too late she realized that the rucksack contained Dalek DNA and she rushed towards the lab. She felt the force of the explosion as the Dalekmites overheated, triggering the cans of nitro-nine hidden in the bottom of the Doctor’s bag.

The Doctor looked on the smouldering remains of the lab, as the files and information dedicated to finding him went up in smoke alongside all the hideous mutant creatures. He picked up the Galimite box from the burnt and charred hand of the woman he’d known only as Ruby.

“How low have we sunk,” he said aloud. “When we use an old man’s dead grandchild against him.”

Stockton scanned the contents of another *Storage Wars* truck. This one looked almost too good to be true, filled with boxes of rubies amongst the usual junk. Nonetheless he was unable to resist bidding. In the weeks since that bloody bitch broke into his home and stole the mysterious box (holding him at gunpoint, no less!) Stockton had been keeping away from the auction scene. Too bloody depressed to bid and barter. Today however, he felt ready, he felt good, he felt confident. GravyTown was back!

The auctioneer today was a stand-in. An old man with a beard and dressed rather

like a disreputable Soho barfly. He was as hopeless as the usual assistant. Too polite, too measured and somewhat ponderous, with a rich distinctive voice.

"Mr Stockton, congratulations on your purchase. Soon hopefully you'll be able to paint the town red." Stockton examined the haul and picked up a handful of the stones. The vibrant reds began to fade at the touch of his warm human hands. Stockton wondered whether he had once again been victim to a mysterious force, but the sickening truth that he had been conned. Looking at the inside of his fingers, Stockton blistered at the sight of the red paint dripping down into his palms.

The Doctor finally found Bill under Waterloo Bridge. A broken man, haunted by what he had done. Bill tried to run, but the Doctor said: "Thank you."

"What have you got to thank me for Smithy?"

"I know it was you Bill. I'm glad my mugging was in safe hands. You learnt how to kill in war, but you also learnt how to survive. I needed to hear those stories, I needed to find a reason to believe again."

"But I… I betrayed you" Bill stammered. "I let you down".

"You were just doing what you could to survive. Once a soldier, always a soldier. Here, take it, I won't be needing this anymore."

The Doctor handed him £6,000 and two pence.

"So tell me Smithy, what is your real name?"

"The Auctioneer, Bill. The Auctioneer, yes that will do for today…"

The Doctor stood in a cemetery. The once beautiful surroundings were now nothing more than a wasteland, the only sound that of the occasional craft flying overhead. He recalled the scene as it had been before, a beautiful park full of families and children.

He pictured little Susan playing *("Grandfather, look at me!"*), and wiped away a tear. Opening the Galimite box he released the species back into the wild.

"So many thousands of you. You've got to have a chance to at least bring some music back to the universe"

Hours later after the last of the Galimites left the box and flew up, singing, into the muddy orange sky, the Doctor held the now empty box tight, letting his fingers, his hands become translucent.

He walked over and placed the box on an unmarked grave.

The Postman

by John Davies

The children sing their cheery songs,

Of times before it all went wrong,

When peace reigned large in all our homes

And not the sprawling war.

The verses speak of calmer times,

Where kindness helped to save our lives,

When people didn't fear the chimes

Of the Postman at their door.

(Excerpt from a Time War nursery rhyme; anon; date and origin unknown)

Hudrix had a reputation for sighing. It wasn't a secret reputation, something muttered in furtive tones by those spying him going about his daily business; it was a trait that had started extremely early in his lives and a reputation he was fully aware of.

As a child he had sighed when someone stole his zero gravity marbles, and later, as he began to realise, and appreciate, the difference between a Time Lord and Time Lady, he had sighed when he realised that both sides were universally failing to appreciate him. It was part of his genetic make-up and it had remained the one constant throughout his various incarnations. All of which remained steadfastly unappreciated.

In a Temporal Regression session conducted a couple of centuries ago he had been able to trace where it had originated. It all stemmed from his first subconscious memory. Tiny, pink and yelling, "I'm not ready!" in Old High Gallifreyan he had been presented to his father. At that defining moment, his father had looked at him, head to toes, sighed and said, "Well, at least he's only stuck with that nose for one life!" He hadn't understood the words, but he had intuitively recognised and absorbed the sigh. And then, one day, this day, as he sat and settled himself into his carved wooden office chair, he knew that he had been given that sigh for a reason. His present job, the exact task of that moment, had been calling to him backwards throughout his time lines. He gulped, closed his eyes and… sighed.

Hudrix reached for his antique Earth biro. Although original it wasn't totally authentic (having been augmented to ensure it would never run out of ink). It was also far from pristine. The end of the pen showed clear evidence of various teeth marks belonging to a couple of his regenerations – one of which had seemingly had an alarming overbite.

Is that that's what I am? pondered Hundrix. *A sigher and a chewer?*

Staring at the blank sheet before him he knew what he was about to write had to begin with the word, 'Dear' and end with his signature. But it was the bits in-between that was causing him bother. With a concerted effort he brought the pen to the paper and, two seconds later, cursing, scrunched-up the thick foolscap into a ball and threw it under his desk. Starting at the end had not been a great beginning.

"Hundrix!" said Sprak, a colleague at the desk next to his. "For god's sake will you *please* stop sighing? Some of us are trying to work!"

Embarrassed, Hudrix mumbled. "Sorry. Just a bit nervous."

"Nervous?" spluttered Sprak, incredulously "Whatever for? You've been doing this job for three hundred years!"

Hudrix nodded. This was certainly true.

"I know," he said, "But there are just some days where it gets to you. Days where you – "

"Sigh just that little bit more?"

"Yes," said Hundrix. "But it's this *job*, Sprak. I mean… what are we doing? What is all this for?"

Sprak lifted a finger from his keyboard and pointed it directly at Hudrix.

"Best not think about it too much, Hundrix" he said. "That way madness lies. Just do what I do and pretend you're writing love poems."

With that, Sprak resumed typing, leaving Hudrix to his second blank sheet. After several minutes in which nothing happened bar an itch on his left earlobe, Hudrix sat back in his chair and, with yet another elaborate sigh (drawing a stern look from Sprak) looked around the room he was in, the place he had worked in for the better part of his seventh and eighth incarnations. It suddenly occurred to him that, in all that time, he had never really looked at it properly before. Or, if he had, familiarity and routine had rendered it an irrelevance. It was just an office after all.

It was time to change this.

The first thing his forced re-acquaintance made him notice was the stench of the place. That and the overpoweringly prevalent orange-and-brownness of the décor. He seemed to associate the two in his mind. The smell and the colour-scheme. It wasn't even a *tangible* scent. More that the room reeked with an air of tired sympathy, disappointment, routine and a species of mental constipation which the colour scheme effortlessly echoed.

Taking in the blank expressions of those sitting both near and far Hudrix shook his head. No, it wasn't just the collective air of forced sincerity. It was the never-ending, never-lessening magnitude of their task. The repetition. And the very real, very unpleasant aroma of unwashed robes.

Although he had only just started his shift, he had finished the last one twenty minutes before. The workload was simply too large and demanding, an undertaking of such magnitude, that to allow for either laundry or sleep would seem an indulgence or a dereliction of patriotic duty.

The War Office Department of Officially Sanctioned Condolence was housed in a room, deep within the bowels of the Capitol, In the early days of the Time War, it had started out as a single room in above the TARDIS licensing bureau. But, as the scale of the war had become apparent and the list of casualties and deaths grew, that single small room – enough for thirteen desks - had been converted by Dimensional Transcendence Engineering to deal with the manpower needed for the ever-growing assignment. And it continued. The War Office Department of Officially Sanctioned Condolence grew and expanded, the office spreading like a malignant stain, a sprawling city of desks, filing cabinets, printers, typewriters, dictation machines, computers, telegraphs, and hundreds and thousands of pale and wan Gallifreyan civil servents, their skin unnourished by sunlight,

And it was here that Hudrix sat, day in, day out: this cavernous chamber of ancient cloisters, huge banks of technology, massive monitor screens and walls adorned with the sigils and seals of a Time Lord society long gone. Festooned with the archaic ornamentation of a culture that, once upon a time, was worth fighting for.

And there was something else. Something that as soon as he realised it was there he was amazed he had been able to blank it out so completely and for so long. The office was loud. Unbearably loud. Whilst his desk had all the technology one could wish for Hudrix used, instead, an ancient Bic biro. Procured centuries ago during a school trip to Earth (Manchester, 1995) it was what he was used to. All around, however, his Time Lord colleagues were typing on keyboards, typewriters, touchscreens, speaking into Speechgleaners, printing countless reams of paper, making audio recordings for the blind, preparing holographic projections, imprinting physic paper and, all the while, the Interstellar Social Media Team monitored all forms of interactive communication referencing the Time War, quick – and careful – to respectfully respond to ease unnecessary hurt and grief to the relative of those who had been lost. It was like bullet fire with keys and letters. In addition to that, in the thousand deep writing/recording pods a menagerie of allied alien life forms were busy translating to the myriad of species and civilisations caught up, and dying, in the hell that was the Time War.

The Time War. Hudrix shuddered. He wasn't here to indulge in re-familiarisation. He had a task to do and a letter to write. He looked at the name on the screen before him: Azbaselandularvenor. Focussing on the paper he wrote his latest, ''It is with regret" letter and, with another sigh, folded the sheet and placed it in an envelope.

"Postman?" he called, holding the envelope high for collection. "Postman? That is

your name, isn't it?"

A shuffling sound slowly approaching him made Hudrix aware the Postman was making his way to his station.

"It is," a well-spoken, tired voice said and Hudrix felt the letter being taken from his grasp.

"Still got that limp then?"

"It will heal," the Postman said. "Probably. What would I know? I'm no doctor. Nor am I a deskbound secretary repeatedly rephrasing sentiment to appear fresh and sincere."

Hudrix scowled. "Is that what you think we're doing here? Soullessly writing platitudes?"

The Postman "Well, you said it. Not my words."

"We mean every word we write! Well,.. I do anyway."

"Hmmm,"

For the first time in all of their interactions Hudrix looked at, and saw the face of the Postman. It was a stern face with kindness held prisoner behind his eyes. His hair was white, almost prematurely. The roots were still dark. His chin and upper lip boasted a fine array of facial hair but Hudrix instinctively knew this was, like the office he was in, grown and unkempt through reasons of action and necessity, no time for vanity. He had heard of the Postman's involvement in the Time War but there and then, in that face, in those eyes, he saw the echoes and the scars of the reality he wrote about in ink.

He couldn't speak.

"I'll just take this, shall I?" the Postman said, motioning to the letter on Hiundrixes desk. "Useless the damned thing lying there. Like this whole ridiculous set up! I mean: what on earth is the point of it?"

Hudrix gulped, still transfixed by those eyes, but managed to say, "You don't understand!"

"Oh, I do, only too well. It's why I left here in the first place " the Postman said. "Well, can't stand around talking all day. Letters to deliver!

The Postman put the letters into his bag.

"Oh, and another thing," he said, wafting the envelope under his nose. "For god's sake, have a shower. You smell worse than trench foot."

Hudrix was about to retaliate when the Postman nodded toward his work station. "Save your breath for sighing. You've just had another two thousand names added to your death list. They're far more important than your ego…"

The Postman turned to walk toward the blue box that, Hudrix knew, was his TARDIS. The 'Post Box' as it was known round these parts.

The Postman limped into his TARDIS and slammed the door shut behind him. The sound of the craft's ancient engines groaned and wheezed and the machine faded into the vortex. The Postman was making his latest delivery.

Hudrix watched it fade, rubbed his nose and got back down to work. Looking at the screen, he realised the Postman had lied.

It wasn't two thousand new names on the list.

It was two million.

Hudrix looked down at his Bic biro. He closed his eyes and sighed.

"Sprak," he said, quietly. "Could you show me how to use a computer?"

The Postman pressed knocked the door.

He had knocked so many doors. Once upon a time he used to break them down. Midnight raids… surprise attacks… surprise parties…

He heard the door being unlatched. It opened a crack. An elderly woman, dressed in a yellow robe, red-band of cloth tied around her head in Widows Warning answered.

"Good day, Madam," the Postman began.

But she had already fallen to her knees weeping before he could say a word.

Hours later, with the post delivered and sorrows exposed and shared, the Postman was back in the TARDIS propped up against the console and filling the room with cigarette smoke. Swigging generously from his silver hipflask and drawing on a *Dunhill International.*

Regrettably, the Universe was not feeling considerate enough to allow this. With a spine-shuddering peel, the bass tones of the Cloister Bell resounded from within the bowels of the craft.

His face an image of resolve, the Postman screwed shut his hipflask and performed a series of checks and counter checks on the instrumentation panel before him.

"Is that it?" he said, "Just the thunder? Where's the lightning?"

A sharp beep from near the door opening mechanism drew the Postman's attention to the mayday alarm.

The Postman re-ran his checks. The time data was returned and co-ordinates were locked in. The TARDIS was taking him to the source of the call for help. But why him? He wasn't ready to face combat again. Not yet. The Time Lords had assured him he would be allowed a period to regain his strength. To come to terms with-

A landing. Sudden. A jolt.

And the Postman shouted and stamped his feet impotently, shaking his fists at the imaginary Time Lords watching him.

"I am not yet ready!" he said, his voice hoarse with rage. "But you already know that, don't you?"

The TARDIS delivered the Postman to a position just on the edge of a fierce battle.

He looked at the melee before him and quickly assessed the situation, weighing it against the information provided him by the TARDIS, he knew it was a battle to be lost. For strategic purposes.

He was to be the General here.

He was to lead them.

"And I, a simple Postman?" he said to himself, eyebrow raised, watching the scene before him. He shook his head, straightened his shoulders and went off to lead the battle.

Running toward the battle, he felt his scars screaming in protest but he ignored their calls and soon achieved a proximity close enough to feel the heat of war and the scent of the battle. He fell in with his fellowmen and when the General screamed attack…

"Dear Lady Azbaselandularvenor, we regret to inform you…"

Seconds bleed into minutes into hours into days into months… … no side gaining advantage … lives blasted from Time, bodies ripped apart by the MagmaWave … screams tear through the air …

"That your son was killed on the fields of Hirash Kam…"

Hirash Kam, I know this place(the Postman said)

"You are no Postman now, General!"

Do not call me 'General' (the Postman said)

"What do we call you, then? Surely not 'Postman'!"

(and the Wardenmen laugh. The soldiers laugh. The survivors –getting fewer by the second – laugh)

"…well loved by his comrades"

What is your name, Sergeant? (the Postman said)

"Wardenman Azbasel." The younger man replied

Do I know your family? (the Postman asked)

"…his death most regretted."

The name seems familiar

I've heard it before …

"…as is every death in this war. However…"

"Fire old man!" a strident voice barked. "Shoot or be shot yourself!"

The world swimming as his pulses raced and his hearts beat faster. Troops were falling before his blurred gaze and he did not want to fire. But, to divert any potential suspicion from him and to allow him to remain alive to assist people and species for the remainder of his existence he knew he had to.

THEN A NOISE SO LOUD -

"…we have reason to believe he died painlessly and peacefully…"

Azbasel… (the screams, the screams, the screams…)

"…and surrounded by comrades…"

Azbasel?

Wardenman Azbasel? (the Postman said)

"Unfortunately we were unable to retrieve the body…"

to the bloody stump of a man, the bone-tree and gristle of Wardenman Azbasel

I delivered a letter to your mother, telling her you were dead (the Postman said)

"…but Gallifrey thanks you. Hail Rassilon!"

In another twisted knot in the barbed-wire timeline of the Time War, a Postman informs a mother of her loss before the boy is even dead.

"…kind regards, Hundrix. (Civil Servitor, Band IX, War Office Department of Officially Sanctioned Condolence)

Far away. Elsewhere.

Looking up into the heavy black and grey sky the Postman screamed at the sky.

He was ready.

In the War Office Department of Officially Sanctioned Condolence Hudrix wasn't sighing. He was chuckling. His latest regeneration had finally buried his sigh and replaced it with a tendency to chuckle. This was, of course, as equally annoying to Sprak and his other colleagues as the sighing but, as yet, the novelty had not worn off.

The reason why Hudrix was chuckling, again, was down to the fact that his new body had also finally allowed him to master the use of a computer to complete his correspondence. His last body had valiantly tried but had quickly reverted back to biro.

This incarnation, however, had snapped bolt upright and declared, “I love technology!” He had then rushed to his desk, after taking a shower, ignored the appreciative comments about his new appearance, and typed a hundred letters in the time it had previously taken him to write three.

Today, he was on fire yet again.

And chuckling.

A swift kick of his shin caused Hudrix to stare at Sprak.

“Yeah,” he said, apologetically, “bad taste. Duly noted!”

Looking down at the counter Hudrix saw the death number and cross referenced it to the relevant name. Opening up the condolence template he began his latest, sincere, letter:

“Dear Lady Azbaselandularvenor

Once again it is with deepest regret….”

Hudrix stopped typing and sighed, causing Sprak to roll his eyes in despair.

He’s already written that one.

Thrice.

The counter had slipped back in time.

“*Technology!*” he cursed, hitting the device, forcing the name to shimmer and reform into that of another bereaved individual.

Casting a furtive eye around his colleagues to ensure they weren’t watching, Hudrix slid a biro from inside his tunic and placed it in his mouth.

The Thief of All Ways

by Elliot Thorpe

Claudia collapsed to the floor in a heap of grime and ripped clothing. The muscles in her legs cramped and bubbled as she felt the cold stone underneath her.

The tunnel was endless, of course. Tunnels always were. But she had entered this labyrinth with one intention: to outrun the man who had been pursuing her halfway across the galaxy. She'd been running so long it had become the only life she knew.

She rolled onto her back, pausing to breathe in the cool air. The curved ceiling above her was oppressive, but high enough to not cause her consternation.

She heard a clattering from the distance, and instinctively grabbed at the antiquated communicator at her belt, before remembering her pursuer had taken it from her on Pandatorea. How many years ago was it now? She'd watched aghast as he'd thrown it into the deep lake and said she didn't need it anymore. She'd disagreed.

She lost him in the jungles and eventually stowed away on a visiting starship. But from that moment on, from that single fleeting conversation with him by the lake, she knew she'd no longer be able to evade him, no matter how many times she changed routes, changed vessels, changed her life.

How much further could she go? Her body screamed at her to stop moving, to stop running. She'd not eaten in three days, and that was before she'd found these tunnels at the top of a massive flight of mountain steps.

"I know you're in here…"

Claudia swallowed hard, her throat tightening. She dared not reply. The little knife she'd stolen from a market stall at the foot of mountain felt reassuring in her pocket. She didn't want to kill her pursuer: she *wasn't* a killer, she just wanted to slow him down and perhaps, finally, here was the place to do it.

She stood and squinted into the gloom. Shafts of light poured through crude holes cut into the roof, and as she stumbled into an antechamber, she gasped.

The room, higher than the tunnels leading to it, contained a series of statues, all of the same figure, seated cross-legged at different angles and either gesturing to the floor or with a hand raised. Along the farthest wall, the same figure reclined in a huge carving of at

least fifty or so feet in length.

Clearly it was some form of deity, Claudia thought as she let out a derisive snort. No gods had helped her or her people and she had little time for such beliefs.

With a sinking feeling she realized the room was a dead end. The only way out now was from the direction she had come. Unsheathing the knife, she glared at one of the statues and moved back towards the entrance. Silhouetted by the light stood her pursuer, the relentless hunter who never tired, never wavered.

As he stepped forward she looked at him, her surprise evident. He looked no older than when she first met him on Pandatorea. He wore the same leather topcoat, all worn and dirty, and under it some sort of bandolier. Around his neck he had a brown scarf and in a mottled hand he held a glowing pen-like device.

"Who are you?" she breathed, realising this was the first time she had ever asked him.

Perhaps it was the haunted look in his eyes, the weary smile he gave her that told of a time when none of them wanted anything to do with this damn war.

"Claudia," the man replied, his voice rasping, "it's time."

He'd had many names, many faces. But the one they said he had now was one that seemed the most apt. He didn't respond to it directly but he knew it was what they called him. He'd rather that than 'the Doctor', which everyone kept insisting who he was. But he felt like an old man, tired and angry and unable to find comfort in anything he did. Even his TARDIS, his one stable companion throughout all his lives, felt distant from him.

He moved around the circular console that was made up of six definitive pieces interspersed by what looked like great curls of coral reaching up from the floor. Clumps of wire and cable dangled and trailed with no clear sense of purpose. Roundels covered the walls.

He'd sent Claudia off to eat and freshen up, giving her convoluted directions to one of the rooms deeper inside the TARDIS.

Soon she re-entered the console room, months of grime washed away to reveal a pretty, olive face, dark hair pulled in a loose pony-tail behind her head. He immediately objected to the black bomber jacket, shooing her back to the wardrobe. She came back, this time in a long burgundy coat, and stood by the inner door, watching her captor with watery grey eyes. She could not determine what his next move would be. Perhaps leaving the knife in the bathroom back there had not been a sensible idea. She could scream and shout, demand to be released, but would that help? Would that turn the situation even more to his advantage? So instead: "Where are you taking me?"

"Earth," the old man said. "Not my first choice. Certainly not *my* choice at all."

"Why Earth?" The question was ignored. She considered asking it again. She changed her mind. "All that stuff back there," she said, tentative steps to work out who this person was, to get inside his head. "Those clothes and things. They're not yours."

The old man looked over to her, the blinking lights from the console illuminating his face. "Not all of it, no."

"Whose are they? Do you usually have a crew? A companion or something? An assistant?"

"Usually."

"Where are they?"

"Not here."

And that appeared to be the end of that particular conversation.

The old man could feel Claudia's stare boring into his back as he moved around the console. No doubt she was scared, which meant unpredictability. At this time in his lives, that was the last thing he needed.

"What part are you playing in the war?" Claudia then asked, stepping forward. "Or should I ask what part *I* am playing?"

The old man sagged as he stood there. How could he answer her? How could he tell her she was the key to winning a major offensive?

"What makes you think it's about you?" A deflection.

"The time you took to find me."

"It wasn't too long." A lie.

"I know what this place is," ventured Claudia, touching one of the roundels. "I know what you are."

"You cannot begin to imagine." A wish.

"You're one of them. A Time Lord. This is a TARDIS." Claudia folded her arms. "That's why you don't look any older than before; why this place is bigger on the inside; how you've been following me for so long."

"I get distracted," the old man said. "It happens."

"You've been fighting in this war forever, haven't you? How long will you go on?"

"As long as I can; as long as I must." He moved a set of dials on the panel before him and the console room shuddered. The TARDIS had crossed a time-stream – something easier to do now that the policing of the temporal vortex was no longer the prime concern of the Time Lords. The old man moved around to stand in front of Claudia. For a moment she wondered if he was about to break down but some inner voice seemed to bring him back to his full height. He exhaled slowly. "Do you expect me to preach about the misfortunes of war? About the fates of innocents?" The lines around his eyes appeared

deeper for that moment. “I will not.”

“What do you want from me? How important am I to you, exactly?”

I’m sorry I scared you, Claudia. But much worse is to come. “I need your help.”

“Why the hell didn’t you just ask? Why chase me across space for most of my adult life? I can’t even *call* it a life!”

“I need you to trust me,” the old man replied. The central column’s internal piping came to a rest with a satisfying *clunk*. “Can you do that?”

“And that’s all there is to it? Is that it? You think that terrifying me…making me look over my shoulder everywhere I went, sleeping but always listening out for you in case you found me…I…I couldn’t even…” Claudia raised fingers to her temples, a headache threatening to form. “You’ve a real funny way of showing me. I don’t know who you are. You won’t even tell me your name.”

“But you *are* here.”

She couldn’t deny that. She was still wary of this strange old man, but a strange calm had enveloped her as soon as she had stepped through the thin blue doors. “Have we arrived? On Earth?”

The man nodded, checked his pen device thing and slipped it into a pocket. “We need to go.”

“When are we?”

“As far as your own timeline is concerned, we’re still in the 29th century.”

“That’s a little vague.”

“It’s what you asked.”

Claudia followed him out of the TARDIS into an oppressively humid room. “Are you always this smug?”

The Time Lord sighed, dug out his pen and waved it around. “It’s not a pen.”

“But I never…how did you…I know it’s not,” she said exasperated. “It’s a sonic…pen.”

“Screwdriver,” he corrected.

“Useful, is it?” she retorted. There was something about this Time Lord that she was beginning to like. He wasn’t unfriendly, just not very approachable. In many ways he reminded her of her step-father.

“To get through that door, yes it is.”

Claudia looked to where he was pointing his sonic screwdriver. It was a blank wall, as featureless as any blank wall could be. “It’s just a wall,” she said.

“Appearances can be deceptive,” the man said and smiled. Claudia thought he was

showing off to her and she got the feeling then that he perhaps missed having company.

Before them the wall split into four sections, each piece sliding diagonally away from the centre. The humidity lifted, replaced by a pungent, earthy aroma. Claudia turned her nose up.

The old man shrugged. and glanced at Claudia. She frowned. His expression was disconcerting, like he pitied her. She looked away stared hard through the gap where the wall once stood.

Inside was a tight-fitting room with ten alcoves about Claudia's height sunk into the grey, featureless walls. Nine of them seemed to have some sort of mesh or semi-transparent cover across. The one that was open nearest to them was covered with more wiring and complex looking equipment than the others. It looked to Claudia like the master pod. It was clear too that they were used as containers for those standing upright.

She thought about trying it on for size, but the interior was off-putting, with thousands of tiny pin-prick holes covering its surface. She shuddered and moved further into the room, peering through the covers of some of the other alcoves before turning her attention to the banks of machinery dotted around the place. Some of the machines had peculiar round dials adorned with coloured triangles, and a huge circular screen dominated the far wall. It appeared to be switched off. The whole area was bathed in a blue-ish glow accompanying a gentle throbbing, rhythmic sound. She was sure she recognised it but… from where?

"Why did it take you so long to catch me?" she asked.

"I had lots of opportunities. But I waited."

"For what?"

"To make sure."

"And are you sure?"

"Certainty is a fool's game in war. I try to never be sure unless I'm sure about it."

"You sure about that?"

The old man smiled that weary smile again. What was it he was carrying inside? This war had made widows and widowers of millions of people across time, loneliness a daily occurrence forced upon the innocent and the young. But he was not young. The war had aged him terribly. And he was lonely. Or a loner. Sometimes it was easy to distinguish. With him it was nigh on impossible.

"You asked me where my companion is," he said. "I travel alone."

"But I get the feeling you don't normally. Why now?"

"They are a hindrance."

"A hindrance to what?"

"They would try to stop me from doing what I'm about to do."

"And what are you about to do?"

"Make you remember."

"Remember what..?"

The Time Lord held her by the hand, Claudia surprised at his gentle touch, and led her back to the empty alcove.

He placed her palm on a square plate near its edge and watched her intently as her eyes widened, a connection made.

"I thought about doing this nine times before. But this is the first," he said.

She grew confused, her mind suddenly filling with things that she couldn't possibly know about: alien worlds with burning skies and Claudiaporated seas; spires of advanced, ancient civilizations twisted into dust; endless lines of machine-like creatures screeching and demanding obeisance; men, women and children from any number of races forced into slavery until they died; countless worlds brought to their knees with unalloyed oppression; order brought from chaos; the logical domination of the universe under Dalek control. *The proper order of things.* As if bitten, Claudia whipped her hand back, cradling her palm. She turned to face the old man, her head spinning. She found it hard to understand yet it did make sense. The universe under Dalek control *was* logical.

Horrified by her own thoughts, she stumbled back. She felt as if she wanted to cry but no tears came. "What the hell…"

"I have opened up a part of your mind that has remained hidden since you were a child. I hid those memories."

"Since I was a child?" Claudia was wringing her hands together. "That was not my childhood."

"You remember your childhood?"

"It was normal. Like any other kid's. Why would mine be any different?" She looked around her, at the banks of equipment and the ten alcoves. "Where did those memories come from? Why would you need to hide them?"

"That concerns you now, more than the idea that you think not unlike a Dalek?"

"I'm not a Dalek!"

"No, you're not." The old man moved over to the nearest computer bank and flicked a series of switches. "But you were grown as one."

What was he saying? None of this made any sense. She was Claudia Callany, born in Switzerland on Earth at midnight on the ninth of March 2843. She remembered her mother, her step-father and her annoying little brothers. "I'm a vet. I trained to look after

sick animals! I had a cat called Mono! She was my best friend! How the hell am I anything to do with the Daleks?"

"You were grown by the Daleks, genetically engineered to perform a single function. I found you when you were two years old, wired into a machine not unlike this one." He gestured at the alcoves around him. "I rescued you and took you to Lucerne. A family raised you as their own."

"But…"

"All that you now remember was implanted in you. You were linked to the hive mind of the Daleks. Everything they do is downloaded into you, even after I rescued you. Stopping that would mean killing you, so I was able to suppress your consciousness, change who and what you are, to let you exist without knowing anything they do."

Claudia moved to touch a covered alcove, its flat surface cold and dark. She wanted to ask a question but was afraid of the answer. The old man tilted his head, understanding her anguish.

"No, you were not alone. Then were ten of you in all."

"Nine others like me? Grown like I was?"

"Claudia," he said, leaning close. "Then were ten of *you*."

The old man flicked another switch and the panels on the nine closed alcoves slid upwards. Claudia reeled away in horror. Her head felt like it was about to explode. There were nine more versions of her, fused into the alcoves by thousands of needle-thin wires. Her counterparts were pale, undernourished, eyes closed, lifeless. They smelt stale and dank. Like they were dead.

Claudia hesitated on the balls of her feet. The desire to look at them was strong.

"If it helps you, you *must* look at them."

Claudia didn't want to. "How did they get here?" she asked instead, voice a hoarse whisper.

"That's not important."

She turned on him. "Not important!"

The Time Lord stepped back. Of all the versions of Claudia he had known, she was the most volatile. Was it because she was the last? Because her programming was beginning to kick in? But she deserved to know. Didn't she?

"I found you and your nine clones. It would have been difficult to have kept you unware of each other. I crossed the void into parallel universes, gave every one of you the same start where I could."

It hadn't occurred to Claudia that the nine clones had actually had lives.

"What was so important about us?"

"You were bred by the Daleks as triggers, identical keys to activate this machine. Together, you were the most powerful objects in the universe. Apart you were nothing. Placing you in parallel universes meant your masters could never find you – and use you."

Claudia breathed out slowly. "But we're together now."

"Yes," he replied, almost with regret.

"You brought us back, didn't you?"

He nodded. "I had to."

"You put them in there. They're still alive. You mean to use me – us – against the Daleks themselves." More synapses connected inside Claudia's head. The machine that surrounded them was a terraformer, buried in the mountains of Canada by Dalek infiltrators decades ago. The intention was to strike out from Earth at EarthGov alliances, causing civil war and interstellar conflict. The Daleks would step in at the alliance's weakest moment and claim conquest of the new terraformed worlds - and be one step closer to overall victory in the Time War. There would be little point in victory over cinders, the Supreme Dalek Council reasoned, so there was logic to make every planet in the Terran solar system – and eventually the Galaxy – a habitable Dalek world.

"The Daleks couldn't use this machine once I hid you. But they're still winning the War. They're building Dalek factories: huge vessels in space that breed millions of them. They're churning out new versions of themselves quicker than anyone can stop them. There are no weapons big enough I can use right now."

"So you're going to use a Dalek one."

"Yes."

"I need to be like them, don't I? Not like a Dalek I mean, but in there like them…" Claudia didn't want to think about becoming wired into that coolly beckoning alcove. But if it meant striking back at the Daleks and saving at least a few planets from their wrath…"But why make sentient machines to work a computer?"

"The Dalek mind is limited in some ways. They need to think illogically to act logically. Making a terraforming machine governed by a relatively free-thinking being introduces creativity and allows the terraformer to work."

"My nine…clones…did they understand?" Claudia looked at them. They were her, but…*not* her. They were like siblings she never knew. Encased in the narrow alcoves, wires and attachments all over them, they looked older than Claudia, tired and drawn. One had grey hair, another greying at the temples, a third almost hairless. Where the needles pierced the skin, the veins had collapsed and bruised. It was a shocking sight and Claudia feared for the pain they were in. Some even had their eyes open, staring yet terrifyingly sightless. "Do they understand?"

"Some of their lives were not as yours were when you were growing up in Lucerne. I tried to keep them as unaware as possible."

"What makes me different?"

"You have ten lives. I've lived not far off that. But I remember my lives. You don't. I saved you from a life of slavery ten times over and I had to tell at least one of you the truth."

Claudia nodded. What he said made sense. Yet there was a memory from her childhood, just on the periphery, one that was hers and not from the hive mind. Of a man, tall, with a shock of curly blonde hair and a coat that made him look like a jester. He'd been kind. Gentle. Assuring her that everything would be just fine.

"Doctor?" she whispered.

The old man tensed, looking down at the floor. "I *used* to be called the Doctor. A doctor listens, heals, helps, cares."

"You're scaring me."

"Yes, I am. If I were still that Doctor, I couldn't do any of this. I'm sorry, Claudia…"

"Why should you be? Without you I would never have known what I was."

"You were better off not knowing."

"No. The Daleks would have used me in ways I can't even imagine. That's a more horrifying thought than this...and it means I can at least do something right." Claudia shook her head, more images now flooding through her. "The hive mind is overflowing with details about you. All your faces, all the times you defeated them."

"And what do those defeats mean? Nothing! They're still here, exterminating, duplicating and assimilating how and where it suits them."

"I've got memories of Spiridon, Reyella, Kemble, Cloudburst, Necros – so many places and times crowding my head. It burns inside them, what you did to them and what you mean to them. You *are* the Doctor. They know that. And you *do* care."

"No," the old man said, trying his hardest to be indignant and stubborn. "Why should I care? You aren't even real. You're a Synthetic. Your skin is cold and your eyes are the wrong colour for a human. The Daleks may be masters of many things, but duplicates and Synthetics they are not."

"You care that they are fighting this war and you care who wins and you cared enough to prepare me for this. You still *are* the Doctor, don't you see?"

"You're wrong. I am not the Doctor. And I don't think I ever will be again." With sudden brutality, he pushed Claudia straight into the waiting alcove.

She cried out, more with surprise than anything. "No! Wait! Please!"

He cranked down on a shuddering handle and the semi-clear panel slammed shut, halting Claudia's protestations. "In war everybody suffers. Even the victors."

He couldn't look her in the eye anymore. The walls and the front of the casket

turned darker and needles began to emerge from the holes, pulling with them the fine wires. There were thousands of them, all preparing to pierce Claudia's synthetic skin, to remove from her very being the core of the programming to activate the machine.

If the man heard Claudia scream he made no indication.

Calmly he operated the controls designed for Dalek sucker arms, using his sonic screwdriver to enter new command paths. The great terraforming machine awoke, preparing to carry out its deadly purpose.

Claudia's life, her ten lives, had been designed for this.

He had saved her as a child, when he was another man, but had brought her back as an adult.

She did understand, he thought, if only for his *own* peace of mind.

He would leave the machine to run its course, pre-program the targets hanging far out in space. When the job was done, the machine would shut down for good.

What would become of Claudia, every one of her, he knew full well.

As he turned to leave, the screen suddenly flickered into life with a static buzz. He hesitated. Should he turn? Should he watch the destruction of the Dalek factory ships? Was it enough to know they were destroyed rather than seeing it for himself?

Just a quick look then. Just to be sure.

But the screen was not displaying any target. It was white and glowing.

Three words formed. The man read them and furrowed his brow.

This was not what he wanted. He did not want to feel like this. Damn himself for turning around. The old curiosities of his former lives would never go.

Thank. You. Doctor.

"You're welcome, Claudia," the old man replied, holding back a tear. "You're welcome."

And with that, he hurried from the room and back to his waiting TARDIS.

The Time Lord Who Came To Tea

by Paul Driscoll

My name is Sophienna, I'm thirteen years old and I don't need a diary. I need a bath. I really do need a bath. *But here you are - the first birthday present I've had in years, so I'd better make good use of you*. I'm a little unsure of how or what to write. When your previous owner handed you over he simply said 'be frank', just like an Earth girl he once knew. So I guess I'm supposed to tell you how it is, no holds barred.

The day started like any other, being woken up by the glare of the second Gallifreyan sun which intensifies as it bounces off the metallic sky trenches and heads straight through my bedroom window. I say window – it's a heart shaped hole in the wall, providentially carved out by a laser strike during the latest Dalek assault on Jericho. Thanks Mr Dalek you do have a heart after all. I hated living under the shadow of Bob the collapsing sky trench. The Time Lords abandoned him years ago when he started falling apart. But worse was to come when last year Dad boarded up my skylight for fear I might get hit by a projectile. In truth we've been living in darkness ever since Mum died. It's not just Bob who's cracked up.

Dad has no idea about the gap in my wall, I keep quiet about it as he'd only go and fill it in. It doubles as a secret hobby hole and that's where I'm going to keep you. Maybe that way I can actually enjoy writing on your ancient pages.

When I was a little girl birthdays were worth getting up early for. My parents made sure my friends could come over for the day even if it meant escorting them across war torn streets. But as each year passed so their numbers diminished until there was no one left to invite. I keep a record of what happened to each one. Wait there - let me find it because I can keep it inside you and in any case it probably needs updating.

Here we go and yes there are a few more names to add:

Sallicia: Recruited as a fruit picker. God, I'll miss you sulky Sal…. one day a month to bring back the harvest is not enough.

Marfil: Kidnapped in an underground assault by the Puritanians. They better be treating you well and not feeding you synthetic carcinogenic muck.

Damala: Consumed by the Reapers whilst attending an illegal Time Ball game. I'd rather die playing it personally. But at least you probably departed happy.

Miep: Moved to Arcadia. Bloody Arcadia. Your distant skyline torments me and seems further away by the day.

So many of my closest friends have sought refuge in the city of Arcadia. Miep left with her folk last night. I've been begging Dad to let us go. There is nothing left for us here…..it's becoming a ghost town. In the press drops the media praises our community resilience but on the ground level it's really more like gang warfare. Is it any wonder I'm talking to you when there's nobody else about? *Dad says it's safer to stay but I hate what we have become. Sure the Dalek assaults have eased off but what about the diseases, the food shortage, the bandits and Puritanians? Pockets of Gallifrey have become filled with all manner of localised pressure groups and cults. In Jericho it's the self professed Puritanians. Arcadia is defended and here we are - sitting ducks lost in a town reduced to a cruel experiment to test out each new piece of defence in this war to begin all wars. Guinea pigs for the better off citizens of Arcadia. To be fair Dad has never been a risk taker. That fell on Mum's shoulders. He worries he won't make the journey without his legs but I would carry him a thousand miles to get away from this hell hole.*

Wearily I forced my way out of bed and gathered my essential equipment ready for another day's scavenging. I'm not proud of it, in fact it sickens me to the core, but my family are Dalek Meat Traders. Yes I know - I gather the stinking, raw pieces of mutant flesh. Let me tell you if you think that's bad it smells infinitely worse when cooking. The smell stays inside your fingernails no matter how hard you scrub them. *Dad prepares it all to sell on, sorting out from my finds the best cuts for roasting, dry curing the tentacles and blending the remainder into an energy drink. In exchange for the meat and juice we are given valuable household items and tech from desperately hungry citizens who travel from across the surrounding areas to find us.* If you had eyes Diary I'd show you our kitchen. It's more horrific than the outside I can tell you. Dalek mutants hung out to dry. Our work surfaces stained with juices from their innards. Bits of raw flesh stuck fast between their cracks. Yeah we love our job. Our buyers don't see this part for they'd never be able to stomach the food if it was still recognisably Dalek.

In all the months we've been doing this, not once have I seen someone pick up their meat with a smile. Sometimes we have to wrestle the beloved treasures from their sweaty grips. It's like they feel they are letting go of their souls and their pasts, defiling themselves in order to survive. And yet the Puritanians call us Dalek Inbreds for what we do. Their very creed based on the mistaken belief that by eating Dalek we become Dalek. Some of us suspect that they must be cannibals because there's nothing else safe enough to live off. The fauna provides insufficient protein to our diets and the wildlife mostly abandoned Jericho even before we Gallifreyans had started to leave. As for the synthetic muck that is dropped by the relief ships – well that should come with a serious health warning.

My boyfriend Mazal is from a Puritanian family, so we are forever looking over our shoulders when we meet up. If we left Jericho together we could be open about our relationship and eat from the same table but Father would never agree to it. He prefers to stay surrounded by the scum of Dalek waste. You know I was determined to find a live Dalek today, couldn't have been a better time to catch my first living mutant. Angry at

the thought of not being able to have my one remaining friend round for tea I needed something to take my frustration out on. The process of purifying their rotten remains is a delicate one and against our instincts we have to handle them with care. The things I could do to a live one. I spend hours in my room planning out strategies, working out ways of trapping and defeating it. We surely hate them even more than the Puritanians do.

It's only in my dreams that I fight with living Daleks. In reality I play my own made up war games, partly to relieve the boredom. But also, we kids long to remember the art of victory. That's why so many take part in the deadly Time Ball games. I'm too young to enter so I've invented my own harmless alternative: Stones vs Dalek Eyes. Each stone represents a Gallifreyan fighting in the war. Raiding the kitchen bin I place the dismembered mutant eyes into jars on my bedroom shelves. Eating the eyes is a step too far for most of us, apart from the vagrants. If I can knock down a jar by throwing a stone at it from my bed, then it's Time Lords 1 Dalek 0. But every time a friend or soldier is lost in the real war or even in the aftermath, their stone goes into the discard pile as a point to the enemy. So long as I've overturned more Dalek eyes than there are Deadstones I am winning the war. O I've got to show you the pride of my collection, my 'set apart stone'.

Can you see those indentations? They are not naturally formed. When in danger I have a nervous habit of running my fingers across the stone in my pocket. The fear turns my brittle nails into claws. Despite the markings it's perfect to me. It represents my war hero, the man who saved my Mother's life when she was my age. Religiously I take it with me wherever I go to keep me safe. Aside from my collection of eyes and stones, I've been building up under my bed a scrapbook of press cutting and eye witness reports about his adventures. I scout for any reference to him from the library to the press drops, recording too any spoken memories or sayings about him from the locals.

When I returned from a reasonably successful scavenge I started to play another game of Stone v Eye. But the sound of the secret knock reverberated throughout our ramshackle house toppling over my neatly piled attack stones. I slowly opened the array of locks and knots rehearsing how I would argue for a birthday bonus from the customer as part of the deal. Nothing could have prepared me for the shock of the face that was to greet me. I must have looked totally insane to him, dumbstruck, shaking and just staring into his burning eyes. I will never forget his first words to me "I believe I am expected for tea" And then handing you over to me wrapped in a crumpled brown paper bag, he simply said "Happy birthday."

After recovering from the shock I went straight into panic mode. We couldn't possibly serve the war hero Dalek for tea, even if it was the best of cuts and well seasoned. Imagine my relief when out of his pocket he pulled three tiny bags of alien herbs and asked for a pot of boiling water. From out of nowhere suddenly the table was filled with a remarkable array of colourful foods presumably gathered from his journeys across the universes. For a warrior he was strangely subdued and though clearly scarred from the horrors of war his demeanour was warm. As Dad shared how Mum had died with my baby brother in childbirth, my war hero was visibly shaken. After all it was he who had suggested Jericho as the name for our town and he who had spearheaded the building of its walls, defences

and infrastructure. It was meant to be our promised land. It pained him to discover that even after his interventions the war was still having devastating long term effects. He was angry to hear how our midwives, nurses and best medical equipment had been seconded to Arcadia and the Military Hospitals.

You know I think I may well run out of your pages. I'll have to check out the abandoned library in the morning – see if there is anything left to write on. Paper has become a fuel source and there are so few books left but it's worth a try.

I was impatient to hear about his exploits, but all he wanted to do was listen. This was my one chance to get to know my idol, the greatest lord of time and space without whom literally I would never have existed, and yet all we talked about was the everyday art of survival in Jericho. So I decided to invite the Warrior into my room, get him away from Father thinking that maybe then he would tell me all the glorious details. Perhaps the press cuttings I had would spur him on.

He never gave me a chance. Those burning eyes quickly scanned the contents of my room as if looking for clues and immediately he pointed towards the hand drawn star hanging from my covered skylight. Mum's star. Fighting back the tears I recalled the days before the Time Lords had erected the sky trench. How on clear nights I would stargaze and dream of travelling the worlds with my parents. How I had named a star after my Mother on the day she died. And how every night thereafter, before dropping off to sleep I would focus upon that star, straining to hear Mum's soothing voice speak of the time the war hero had saved her life. It was the only bedtime story guaranteed to get me to sleep during the Dalek raids. But then for seven long years Bob had almost completely obscured the precious view. We had no idea just how vast those trenches would measure but the promise of being defended meant we had willingly paid for the privilege. It's a fact Dad never tires of moaning about. And now Dad's paranoia has made even the most fleeting glimpses of her star impossible. When he boarded up my skylight he had the nerve to celebrate; the pleasure of seeing the back of Bob seemingly outweighing his daughter's loss. The only way I can see Mum's star now is to travel several miles across the rough terrain and in darkness that is sheer foolishness. My sketch is a poor substitute I know, but it's all I have left. I think I shall pull it down later and trace it on your inside cover.

I was completely unprepared for what happened next. Taking my hand the Warrior led me from the house and stumbling over the rotting bodies deliberately left outside to give the impression that our homes have been abandoned, we entered The Bunker. The Bunker leads to an underground network that connects various parts of Jericho. Once a vital protection against Dalek assaults, these tunnels are now filled with dangers of our own making. Don't tell Dad but I prefer to travel around on the surface. *"Why are you taking me down here?" I asked with feigned indignation, but I couldn't possibly mask my genuine excitement*. I'm sure it came out like a squeal instead of a shout. *As I slid after him down a ladder to a lower level I'd never noticed before, I could just about hear his reply echoing from the caves below "you are very mistaken my girl – we are going up Sophienna – we are going up." It was then that I heard a sound increasing in volume as if trying to awaken buried memories. Rhythmic yet soothing, it was the noise my mother would make*

shushing me at the end of the bedtime story whilst she stroked my head: A wheezing, groaning sound. Without my even knowing it we had entered and travelled in the Warrior's TARDIS. He opened her doors and there we were balanced precariously on the sky trench above my home.

I looked up, rubbing away the tears so that unhindered and for the first time in seven years I could see my Mother's star shining on me in its full celestial glory. No, no don't start again you'll smudge the page. *Suddenly, from finding it so damned hard to articulate my experiences back home, I felt free to talk with abandon about the war. Free to tell him and her how I had been surviving day to day.* As if his life depended on it my war hero pleaded with me to share these experiences inside your pages, to start recording my story instead of piecing together the bits and pieces of his. For to him I was the true hero of the war. It was as if he was reaching out to me for understanding, wanting to feel how I feel. *I don't know what came over me but the next thing I knew I was grabbing his hand forcing him to look down at the battered and bruised landscape below. It was his turn to travel with me.*

"You come and go, fixing things and leaving them as if they can stay mended. But even after the victory the horrors of war multiply. Mum didn't die in war - but she died because of it. Ask yourself what did you save her for? Every day I face a daily struggle to survive, to keep Father alive. The Time Lords like distant gods curse the kids, but what chance have we got? My school days finished when the last of our teachers fled to Arcadia - lessons in ancient Gallifreyan replaced by demonstrations of how to skin a cat. You've taken me on an incredible journey and for that I am truly grateful, but if you want to understand you need to walk in my shoes, follow my lead. Let me take you on the trip of *your* lifetime. Come and face the hostile terrain without using your TARDIS as a shortcut or hideout."

O how I wish I hadn't at this point pulled back my worn out footwear to expose the gangrenous toes and rotting feet - but he got the message. In truth having him join me on a trip to get Father's medical supplies was as much for my benefit as his. Every journey from now on can remind me of the day he came along. I can imagine my great war hero travelling beside me, living the war with me. I no longer have to feel alone. If he hadn't have accepted then each fresh scavenger hunt, each trip for supplies would instead be a painful reminder of the day when he took me away from this mess to see the stars.

The TARDIS materialised several miles away from home, landing us immediately outside the medical centre. Collecting the supplies we made our way across the wastelands. Having left my rucksack at home, we had to substitute essential inventory items with equivalents from the TARDIS. What was it the Warrior called them? Ah yes headphones and hardhats*. The sounds of the warships flying overhead towards Arcadia can permanently damage the eardrum and every time they pass over they disturb the abandoned sky trenches sending down showers of debris. My hero was in a hurry to pass but I insisted he help me forage from the debris anything that could be recycled or traded. These showers are manna to us here in Jericho compared to the patronising and official press and meagre aid drops.*

We bypassed the militia training site via the underground network, encountering

along the way a gang of Puritanians. I went to clasp my set apart stone but in its absence and conscious of the irony reached out for my hero's hand. Using my charms and a little bribery we continued on. I think he was genuinely impressed. I hated going underground but for one square mile above us civilian freedom fighters trial new weaponry, using chemicals and forbidden time manipulation technology. Down below, the Puritanians, other gangs or lone opportunists are invariably waiting to pounce knowing their victims have no way of escape in the narrow alcoves. The things I have had to do to get past them. By this point I was surprised at how unfit my war hero was, he was out of breath and complaining like a child "are we nearly there yet". I genuinely wondered whether he would be able to make it back to his TARDIS alone. He could have turned around at this point but was determined to see the journey through to the bitter end. You know even though he had saved her life I think he felt guilty about leaving my Mum all those years ago - this was like unfinished business to him.

As we arrived in full view of the house we sensed a movement from behind the long crimson weed bed that was once our neighbour's garden. A Dalek gun slowly protruded through the overgrowth. My heart skipped a beat when I realised we were not the ones moving. This Dalek was alive. I glanced at my companion for suggestions but his "any ideas" response was not particularly reassuring. Two seconds later his wink reminded me that of course I had ideas. I'd been working them out for god knows how long. Smiling I put into motion my latest attack strategy. I needn't have bothered. Disappointingly the battle weary Dalek was barely alive and far easier to catch than I'd hoped. Nonetheless it was my first live one and wrenching off its gun I pummelled the defenceless mutant with the sharp broken end, fuelled by all those years of pent up anger.

Exhausted I collapsed into the grass. My fellow traveller knelt beside me and rocking me whispered a long forgotten favourite lullaby "Dear friend, Dear friend, let your weeping now end, The Dalek is dead and its masters have fled. Let this be your time to mend." This headstrong, worldly wise young woman was still just a girl after all. It dawned on me that Mum must have learnt the song from her saviour. Sobbing, I buried my head into his arms. As if reinvigorated by that tender moment he carried me with ease the rest of the way home.

I don't know how many of the stories about him are true, but one thing I am certain of - he was as good as a doctor to me. I like to think I helped him too. I know diary - I shouldn't be so taken with him, after all what was it he had said before leaving?

"You must let me go now, and with me all your false beliefs and hopes about my role in the war. Today you have shown me that you are the true war hero. Your Mother would have been so proud. So tell your stories, tell them with all the gory, borey details – the dangerous bits and the dull bits too: the things that have turned you into a woman and the things that have kept you a girl. Write them all down lest we forget."

I'm going again, god I'm well and truly going again... never cried so much in one day. Stop it Sopheinna. No really stop it. Now where are those stones... I've a new Dalek eye to smash.

Griffin

The Nightmare Child

Hellbound the shell rose, 'neath Hunder, grief and genocide

Hollow and caustic, this holocaust of Time

I spit on thy warmth, thy faith, thy hours and days

Left weeping, thou art but broiling burnt fodder

Where Reapers feast, and force their crime

On the infect'd wound of Gallifrey kind

Ever regenerating, every naissance multiplied

Burn, ye Stalkers, ye Reapers, ye Kaleds

Feed the belly of the Nightmare Childe

Feed with Ferrousity, stark thy bone to book

Ha! Thou art a thirteenthman, (thy prospects are obside)

Perch ye here, pune Time Lord

Perch ye, hook ye, bleed The Nightmare Childe

6.131 (Ch 209) The Nechronomium

Ferrousity, they called it. The Silver Fleet. The last grains of a reality that included *Mondas* (the squandered planet from the ragshead hypathia of lost universes) woven into BarrowShips for the Lords Of Time. Seven million sleek Quantum Schooners headed straight for the Chimera Zone, Bastardised TARDISes, replete with the New Seal of Rassilon emblazoned on their pourbrow, burning Harmony's Eye as fuel

What ghast! What ghastsome, switchblade inferno the Chimera Zone was. Kaled twisted time bubble wasteland; spatial vulgarity and planets misused as bullets. In the centre of the place, like a rats-eye on a marble plinth, the Nightmare Child sat in Imperium, its brutal bedevilled spine-satellites hanging in circumference, like spooling malignancies.

A star was stoked for an engine, and the engine glowed black...

The fleet *Ferrousity* charged, ten-billion years into the past, while its flagship and shuttle-yachts split sideways, frontways, underways, sailing to the future where the battle was already won.

Or lost.

Or both. But never simultaneously. Always in isolation and always with the fierce tempest of vortex and vworp, "exterminate" and "βψ γαλλιφρεψ", red against bronze, blood against metal.

The Chimera Zone shuddered and shrank and flickered and floundered. But it remained. A bloodstain on the Vortex, increasing and dwindling all the time.

At all times.

"And to think," said the old Time Lord leading the charge, the weight of war and Time heavy on him like a rucksack filled with bones. "This all began as a mild curiosity in a junkyard…"

The Nightmare Child existed at all times, all at once and always at that moment. And never any of the moments or minutes at the same time. A paradox fashioned from the corpse of a dead infant Reaper, torn, like a limb from a leper, from its crib and left to rot on the edge of the vortex by parents that cleansed themselves from existence in regret…

Davros, stolen from Time by the advance mission of the Kaled Sectoriut, held prisoner-chieftain in a spineglass chamber impossible for the Augment Flice – the temporalvermin Nano Spies employed by those crotchers, those craven, those crude subbatards: the Black Order of Rassilon – to intercept or to inquire.

Not a one, not a single Flice, reported the presence of Davros. Had it done so, perhaps the barbarism and furysome quantum slaughter of Chimera would have ended differently. Or, if one were being fanciful, averted altogether? Had they known that the Kaled Kalif, the blueprint bastard-engineer of the Skaro Sickening, the Dalekofascist skunk and survivor of all attempts on his variations of life; the Crook, the Creep, the Cringeling, the perverter, the poser, the putrid…

Yet there he was. Davros lived. The Nightmare Child, the secret – kept to last - by the Emperors of the Daleks held, in its gristle and fleshstone heart, the only weapon they had left. The only weapon worth fighting for.

"Do you know," the Time Lord said. "I've rather missed the old boy over the years."

The Wardenmen were taken aback. There was murmur in the ranks. Incomprehension. This was common whenever The Old Man in the Bandolier took charge.

(The Corsair, long since disappeared, had called him thus. Not a Wardenman amongst the crew dared call him 'Doctor')

"If Davros is within the Nightmare Child, then we ought to rescue him."

Consternation.

Confusion.

Apprehension.

Anger.

Then … Rebellion.

If we save Davros we lose the War. If Davros is saved the War is lost. If the War is lost, Davros is saved. If Lost War Davros Is Saved, War Saved Time Loss Davros…

Or any combination of possibilities and alternatives.

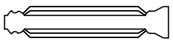
The Nightmare Child.

We must destroy the Nightmare Child.

The Nightmare Child must be destroyed

(and so forth)

Next!?



Davros, prisoner of the Emperor, awakened from slumber and brought back to vivanticity, sits warm and angry in the squeamish womb of the nascent Nightmare Child, the vessel to destroy all Time and make the Gallifreyans crutch and stumble for a piece of peace…

"How… am … I … alive ..?" he says.

The Emperor's Computum scans the greyskinned beast-momie of Davros. The Emperors Computum cannot answer.

"Am I in the maws, the very jaws, of the Nightmare Child?" says he.

He is. And will be, again and again and again and again and again… Returned to this moment in time and space to act as the clean genetic circuit betwixt the Reaper-bones and the Skaro circuitium.

Flitting back and forth between one timezone and another. Forever. Always.

The attack upon the Nightmare Child is beyond the powers of description and explanation.

The Time Lord, the Man In the Bandolier, reaches Davros' chamber. He sees the Father Of The Daleks fight against these beasts that assail him and, momentarily disremembering centuries of training, prejudice and wrath, holds out his hand to save the wretched, blacktoothed thug….

Davros disappears…

Davros returns.

Davros disappears…

Davros returns.

Davros disappears…

Davros disappears…

The battle has just begun. The Man in the Bandolier waits a while. Then he re-joins the fight.

The Doctor watches as Davros fades away, then re-appears (perhaps decades older). It happens again and again and again. If the Doctor were still the Doctor he would do something about this. As it is, all he can do is help where he can, and lead Hell back to Hades…

Meals on Wheels

by Paul Magrs

And it wasn't like Jackie didn't have enough to do. She wasn't filling up her extra hours because she felt lonely or nothing. It was just good, Mandy from the Poundshop said, to give a little something back to society, and that.

But now Jackie was thinking Meals on Wheels maybe wasn't for her.

'Mr Ross? Are you in there?'

She was spending longer each day shouting through his letterbox at him. Old git.

The tray was steaming hot in her hand. The hand that wasn't braced against the front door of his flat as she knelt there on the cold concrete.

'And you can clear out of it, too,' she muttered at Mrs Higgins, who was idling by with her tartan shopping bag. Wondering why Jackie was shouting at Mr Ross again. Maybe it had been a mistake volunteering herself for her own block?

'Mr Ross. Please open up. It's your favourite today. And jam sponge with custard, too. You'll like it.'

The pensioners round here ate better than she did, actually. Some of them complained about the quality of the stuff they got doled out. Jackie wouldn't have complained. I live off chicken nuggets and Sainsbury's Chardonnay. I'd be glad of a bleedin' home-cooked meal, even if it did arrive in foil.

'Mr Ross!' she banged harder.

Course, with Rose gone again it wasn't like it was worth cooking a proper meal in the evening. This was the longest stint her daughter had been away for.

Mr R…!'

The old boy opened the door sharpish, catching her out so she stumbled again. He liked making her do that.

He was there in his front hall. Glaring up at her from his wheelchair.

'Decided to let me in, eh?' she smiled at his cross old face. He really was the worst old sod she delivered to. Some of them were so sweet, the old folk. So pleased and grateful

to see you.

Others were just evil.

Like this old git.

Jackie had been on the Meals on Wheels for a fortnight and already it seemed like a lifetime.

'How are you doing today, Mr Ross?' she asked breezily, taking his tray into the kitchen to dish up for him. He slammed the front door with his one good arm and followed her.

'I've been plotting the ultimate destruction of this world and my revenge upon all of mankind,' he said, furiously.

'Oh, yes?' Jackie smiled, and went through the cupboards looking for a clean glass. 'Look, shall I do these dishes? They've been standing here for days.'

She rolled up her sleeves and, turning back again, saw that he had fallen quiet. He looked a bit glum, actually. She stepped closer.

'I dreamt last night of the Nightmare Child,' he whispered. He stared into space. Over her shoulder as she crouched to hear him. His words put the willies up her.

'I-I don't know what you mean, Dave.'

'It's waiting for me. Out there… somewhere in the galaxy. The Nightmare Child. And its ghastly maw hangs open… just waiting for the day when it will… swallow me up. Crush out my life force at last. I have seen the future. My ultimate destiny. In my dreams…'

Jackie frowned. 'I think you've been taking too many of your pills before you sleep at night, love.'

His face curdled with fury as he snapped out of his spell and stared at her. The force of his gaze made her step backwards. 'You will all beg for my mercy in the end,' he shouted. 'When my creations find me at last in this benighted place. All of mankind will suffer exquisitely at my hand.'

She shivered. He was having a right old funny turn today. Best get him fed and sorted out. She became brisk.

'It's mince and dumplings. You'll like that.'

'I will reserve the very worst punishment for you, Jackie Tyler,' he spat out in his gravelly voice. That's where a lifetime's smoking gets you, Jackie thought, shaking her head.

'Shall we get you settled at the table? I'm ever so envious of your open plan living / dining area. Was it like this when you moved in?'

He followed her miserably, wheeling down the hall. 'You will die horribly in uttermost agony! Rueing the very day you first heard my name! I can promise you that, Jackie Tyler!'

She popped the tray down, with a knife and fork, a glass of tap water and a paper

napkin. A Christmas one, but she was sure he wouldn't mind. 'There you are, love.'

'Oh,' he said, in a softer voice, interested suddenly as he came wheeling forward. 'Dumplings.'

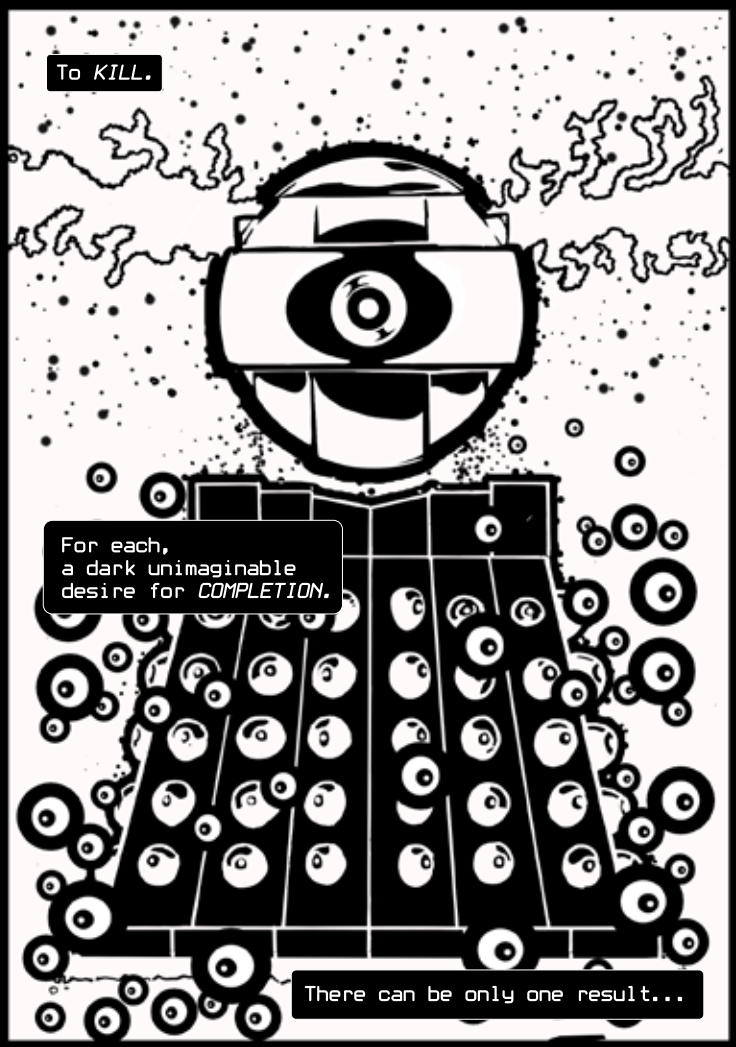
In an infinite metaverse there will always be time enough for love; time enough for hate...
Time enough for life; time enough for death...
But even in an infinite metaverse, can there ever really be...

TIME ENOUGH FOR WAR

Words by Jim Mortimore Art by Simon A Brett

Throughout time, in the ∞th plane of METASPACE, which some call THE VORTEX, titanic forces collide. Call them good and evil, God and anti God, classical or neo classical reality; it does not matter, for names are simply icons and in a realm without life icons are meaningless.

Two Titans then, nameless and ancient, to whom the lives of galaxies are but fleeting heartbeats.
Promethean Colossi so terrifyingly old they have forgotten who they were and whence they came; the moment of their birth lost to memory for the lifetimes of universes.
N-tities which, despite their infinite age, know only child like NEED.
To *SAVE*.



WAR!

Downstream: PRE EMPTIVE STRIKE!
Predicting a future when Dalek Life will supplant all other life, the Time Lords attempt to destroy the Daleks before they are created.

Upstream: INFILTRATION!
Responding to a Galliffreyan pre emptive first strike, an attempt is made to replace members of the Time Lord High Council with Dalek duplicates.

Upstream: Even the Eternals, despairing of a coherent reality, flee the metaverse forever

Downstream: The Great Animus perishes as its Carcinoma webs crumble to dust...

Downstream: CHAOS! No one now can say Conflict or the Downstream: Eternal Conflict were prologue or if the Raven Uprising Great War. Omnicraven Uprising were the epilogue to the Great War.

Under the Mistream: Art by Jeremy Love
Upstream: DESTRUCTION! Rest in peace Rema Du, Dalek Prime Destroyer of Worlds. Whomever takes up the mantle of Dalek Supreme Commander will have big shoes to fill.

Upstream: ESCALATION! Sontaran reprisals for the murder of Ambassador Grilox by Ambassador Rema Du's agent, Wardog... The reprisals drag a thousand intelligent species into the war.

Time is a river.
The War creates TEMPORAL TSUNAMIS which crash against every shore of TIME AND SPACE.

Mommy?

The current of time is disrupted, as advanced civilisations UN-EVOLVE back through primitive species to PRIMORDIAL SLIME...

In this chaos...*THE TITANS CLASH!*

Upstream: In the steaming jungles and bayous of Cheem the Congress of Trees beholds the bloodshed and weeps. But ever tears of fire proof sap cannot protect them from the holocaust to come

Downstream: At the Nexus of Branes the Nestene Consciousness mutates due to temporal stress... its new affinity for plastic born from the forced rape of its former techno-crib...

Because so little former history survives unaltered, the full story of the Great War can never be fully be known.

The few surviving records have been culled from RELATIVE TEMPORAL DATA retrieved from the ASYNCHRONICITY-MATRIX.

Their weapons: planets and stars; taxes and dreams; history, religion and myth.

Need begets violence.
The incandescent passion of the once mortal Titans annihilates not only all things that were but all things that *ever* were. Polar opposites, joined in desire; mating and negating, they make a nothing of the metaverse.

So the Great War continues, beyond space, beyond time, to the utter desolation of both. And as life is unmade, and names and empires and galactic histories like grains of sand are lost forever, so the *GREAT WAR* becomes the *LAST WAR* and then the *ONLY WAR*...

Centuries and aeons and lives of universes like crazed reflections in a dark, eternal mirror maze

The cycle of conflict is endless.

Entire species artificially evolved into gestalt super-weapons...

Faiths like strings of novae burned to ash...

Worlds are sterilised...

ARMADAS are VAPORISED...

Death-rattle riffs on a timeless symphony of death...

FSF POWER SUPER FARMIES attempt to reach the BLACK HOLE GENESIS... and be generated into PURE ENERGY!

Until...

At long last against all hope...

A day arrives such as the eternal metaverse has ever seen...

A day upon which the gods and their dooms may forever be reconciled...

They are the same, these behemoths, though they do not know it: incapable of perceiving the truth of their own existence, each absolutely assured of their own right to divinity, to sole existence.

Infinitely sheared universes... LIFE BEYOND KNOWING across all of time... UNFATHOMABLE NIRVANA pursuit of UNTRAINABLE ultimate LIBERATION ultimate CONTROL.

PLANETS and STARS are SMASHED ASUNDER in MUTUAL ANNIHILATION, while QUASAR-CANNONS REDUCE entire GALAXIES to scattered bursts of RADIANT ENERGY...

Nothing remains to liberate

IS THE INFINITE WAR OVER?

NOTHING REMAINS TO CONTROL

It will NEVER be over while YOU exist.

STALEMATE!

This conceptual dichotomy is a false resolution...

...LEADING ONLY TO MUTUAL ANNIHILATION...

... or eternal unfulfilled existence.

NEITHER CONCLUSION IS SATISFACTORY.

Nonetheless it is what we have made.

NOT ACCEPTABLE!

Neither side can exist without the other.

NEITHER SIDE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO DESTROY THE OTHER.

One of us could surrender.

SELF EXTERMINATION IS NOT ACCEPTABLE!

IMPASSE!

A SOLUTION MUST BE FOUND.

We will construct a composite entity.

AN ULTIMATE WEAPON.

A weapon to unmake the Infinite War.

WE WILL WEAPONISE TIME ITSELF!

We will give it form...

WE WILL GIVE IT INTELLIGENCE...

Teach it to love...

TO HATE...

To kill!

To heal!

DALEK LIFE MUST SURVIVE GALLIFREYAN LIFE IN NEW REALITY.

Of course.

GALLIFREYAN LIFE WILL MAKE SIMILAR ASSUMPTION.

We must take our chances. It is fate.

DALEKS DO NOT BELIEVE IN FATE.
PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTABLE. BEGIN CONSTRUCTION!

For eternally stalemated enemies the ALLIANCE is a BOLD and INVIGORATING FLIGHT of IMAGINATION.

The *WEAPON* will *COLLAPSE* the infinitely sheaved *METAVERSE* until only a *SINGLE REALITY* remains.

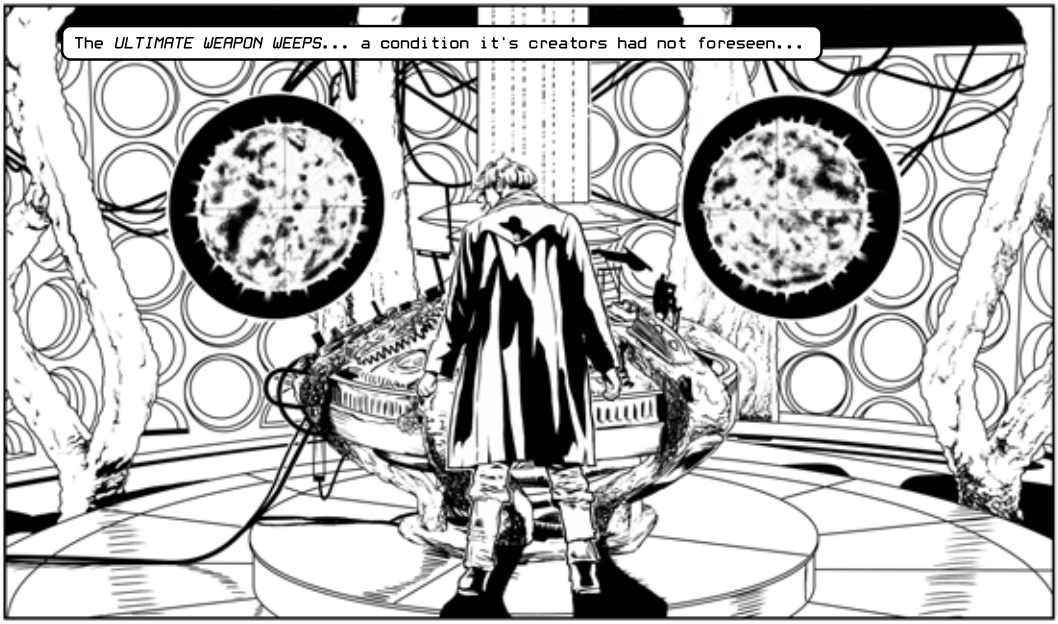
Taking it's chances in the new order, just as it's creators must.

If any of them survive at all.

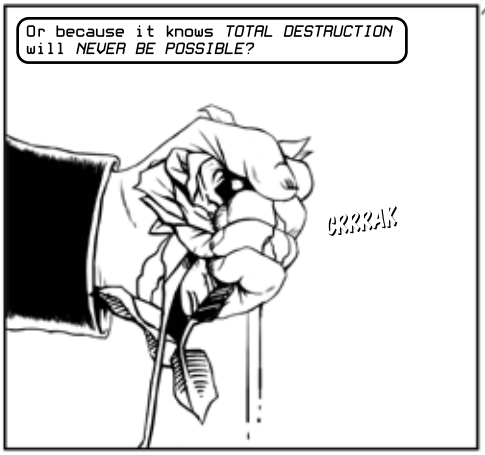
DESIGNATE CODENAME FOR ULTIMATE WEAPON!

The weapon is already complete. All that remains is to name it...the first name of the new reality...

Codename is...


The *ULTIMATE WEAPON WEEPS*... a condition it's creators had not foreseen...

But does it weep because it can only *SAVE REALITY* by *TOTALLY DESTROYING* two *MIGHTY CIVILISATIONS*...


Or because it knows *TOTAL DESTRUCTION* will *NEVER BE POSSIBLE?*
CRRRAK

end

Doctor Death

by Barnaby Eaton-Jones

"You would think I was mad."

The words were taken by the wind and swirled around the head of the weary traveller with the warm, cracked voice.

"Perhaps I am." he said. "Or perhaps I'm the only sane one left and everyone else is mad? Illogical logic. The universe is mad and I'm just a sane man in a blue box. Well... sitting on a blue box."

The traveller patted the hard surface that he was sat on, his back pressed against a small unlit Police Box lamp. To an observer, of which there were none in this desolate swamp, it would have seemed an odd place to stick a small, hard, blue platform with a lamp on it. But, the traveller knew better. A muffled hum came up from the cloying mud that steadfastly sucked up to him like a dirty sycophant, a motionless sea of unrelenting brown for as far as the eye could see. Buried beneath was a tall, rectangular time machine. *His* time machine.

The traveller's tired eyes squinted into the distance. Underneath the blazing heat of triple suns and the old, worn and battered clothes that hung heavy on his small frame, he felt ancient and exhausted, this body weak and weary.

"It's at times like these," he said aloud, "that I wish I could rescue myself."

An explosion showered the ozone with grim fireworks and pushed the TARDIS down towards the surface of the planet. He had thought, as he raced around the console under the glow of huge white roundels, that he could ride the slipstream and pull out of the planet's atmosphere. The last settlement was intact, there were survivors, and he'd held off the attack force for the time being.

The central column shuddered and froze. Had he landed on the surface, or spiraled off into the outer reaches of the galaxy?

It was a very big explosion. The kind that, sadly, held no surprise or wonder for him anymore. He was sure he had been compassionate when he was younger, when he was

bright and sprightly and with an elfin spark to his features. But, now, after constant and countless battles, after the pain, the torture, the years of hiding, he was haggard, cowed, shuffling. There was still a rebellious twinkle in his eyes but he'd lost an awful lot of himself over this lifetime.

He stroked his whiskered face as the scanner showed back and the doors creaked slowly open. He peered out of the doors. The TARDIS was lilting very slowly backwards and, more worryingly, downwards. The suns in the clear purple sky burned into his eyes as he climbed out on to the roof of his sinking machine.

"Well," he said, "this is a desolate sludge of a place."

Across the brown sea a small black blob began to form. A shape distorted by the haze and heat.

He didn't notice it at first. He'd been using his sonic screwdriver to assess the viscosity of the mud. He'd even stuck the end in and then licked the mud off, as he was sure that one planet he'd visited in the past had been entirely edible. This was not that planet.

The black shape on the horizon was more visible now: a tall, imposing figure moving very slowly and rigidly.

"Hello," he said "What is this?

He searched in his inside jacket pocket for his telescope, the one he'd built from a Dalek eyestalk all those years ago. But with a sigh he remembered he'd left it in the TARDIS. And he was currently sitting on its roof with no way of getting back in.

"At least the TARDIS has stopped sinking. For the time being. I don't know why I'm telling myself this. What is it they say about the first sign of madness? It's..."

He paused as he caught a clearer sight of the figure, still moving slowly towards him.

"...mirages." he continued. The figure was robed, that much he could make out. It wore a heavy, black, hooded robe and carried a large, curved stick in one hand. In the haze and heat, the curved stick looked as if it could have been a scythe...

Oh yes. Of course!

"It's Death."

He laughed out loud, throwing back his head. His whole face creased with laughter, the wide smile split across his face, making him look years younger.

"I'm going to have to modify that list. Seeing Death. That's the first sign of madness. Mirages. That's the second. Talking to myself? I'm coming around to the idea that that isn't quite so bad now. But... yes. Death."

He laughed again.

The black, robed figure with the slow, measured gait and the long imposing scythe, got steadily closer.

"Hello, Death!" he shouted, into the muggy air. "I knew he wouldn't reply. Got much better things to do, I expect."

In the dark recesses of the corridor, the weary time traveller cradled his dying companion. The girl with the purple hair.

The glancing blast of a laser rifle had seemed to burn itself into the wall but, minutes later, she collapsed and – it was clear – wouldn't be getting back to her feet.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I shouldn't have brought you with me. I'm very much afraid I have broken one of my own rules"

"You didn't have much choice," she said, her voice weak. Fading.

"I always have the choice," he said, "but it would seem I've made the wrong one."

"Hey," she said, "It's not your fault."

"It never is."

"We saved all those people."

"Yes, we did. But... I'm sorry. I can't save you."

"I know."

She smiled up at him, with a half-grimace, and reached for his face. Running her fingers across the craggy contours of his skin, she felt him smile underneath her fingers.

"You got old fast, Mr. Foreman," she said. "I met you a year ago and you were young. So young."

"Sleep on. Jenny Shirt" he said to the purple haired girl he had known for several hundred years, holding her close. "For I have rocked many like you to sleep and yet, I cannot sleep myself. Not yet. Not ever. I shall not sleep."

And Jenny Shirt died.

"Death. Well that *is* a surprise," he called out, "If you are indeed Death. Always thought that you were something of a myth. Coming for me, then? Nothing new there. But why now? Why here? The war, perhaps?"

The three suns were sinking. The mud shifted. A slight movement, but he could feel it.

"How quick do the suns die up above?" he asked nobody. "Will they die before I die? I'm assuming you'll claim me before the horizon claims the light."

He shifted his position on the top of his time machine and sat upright.

"Will you get to me before I get away I wonder? I always get away. I don't know how. Luck, presumably. Though I wouldn't call myself particularly lucky. And what will you call me? Murderer? Peacekeeper? Traveller? Assassin? Warrior? Coward? Victim? I don't give myself a name. Not anymore. I don't deserve a name and I'm too old and tired to explain why."

He paused. The robed figure continued its slow march toward him.

"You don't care. Why should you? You're Death after all. You care for nothing. People say I cared too much. Or, perhaps, too little. I can't tell anymore. Each little personal victory for me is a defeat for someone else. I breathe war. Can you smell it on my breath? I taste it every day and I can't spit it out. I can't wash it away."

In the tall gleaming tower high above the starving, ruined, desecrated city...

"Do I know you?" asked the Ambassador, looking the scruffy figure up and down.

"No." he said, sitting down on the nearby seat and swinging his muddy booted feet up onto the polished table. "But I know you."

"Everyone knows me, I'm afraid. It's the privilege of my position. I can't help that. You, however, look like you've gained entry into my quarters illegally. Uninvited!"

The intruder laughed. It was a grim, dark laugh. He took out a long, thin, silver device with a shining red light on the end.

"Do you know," he said "I don't think I've ever truly been invited anywhere."

"Have you been sent here to kill me?" the Ambassador asked.

"Yes."

"And how are you going to do that?"

"I'm not." he said, still looking far too relaxed. The Ambassador half-smiled and walked to the window to look out over the city below.

"You jest with me, I expect. Gloating."

"I never gloat. Wouldn't know how. That's your thing, isn't it? Gloating?" the intruder said with a snarl. "I do hope it isn't infectious?"

The Ambassador swung round and slammed his hands on the table, his face red with rage. He shouted with such volume that he began to shake.

"You think you can judge me? That I will never atone for my actions? You think I sleep the sleep of the just and the justified? I don't! I never will! Put yourself in my position. What was I supposed to do?" His veins began to bulge from his forehead and beads of sweat glistened as they ran down his face. His eyes darted around as he spoke, as if he felt

he was being watched by a room full of people.

"Stop" the intruder replied. "That's all you're supposed to do. Stop."

"Stop?!!!" roared the Ambassador. "You think it's that easy? I'll be killed. I'll. Be. KILLED! Murdered in my bed. I don't work for those millions down below me. I work for those up there!"

He pointed to the sky and swayed as his rage took him over.

"I was forced to work for them! If you know me, you know I'm telling the truth. I saved my life and secured theirs. All of them. Working for the enemy without even knowing it. But, then the rumours started and the idiotic scaremongering... I never said I liked it. I never said that!" he screamed.

And still the visitor sat where he was, booted feet on the table, twiddling his sonic device and staring quizzically at the Ambassador. Saying nothing.

"Well, SAY SOMETHING!" he screamed, backing away into the window.

There was silence, and then the Ambassador started sobbing uncontrollably. He beat against the window with his fists and screamed. He pressed a glowing green circle on the window and the whole panel slid open. He turned back to the unmoving figure in the seat and collapsed on his knees, his hands clasped into some biblical ritual. He muttered words under his breath and he finally stood up. He didn't look backwards but stared straight into the haggard face of his supposed opponent.

"JUDAS!" he cried and let himself fall backwards, out of the window and into the void.

There was a heavy, deep sigh from the seat and the sonic device was pocketed back into the long black coat. The booted feet were taken off the table and, with heavy hearts, the figure left the Ambassador's quarters, his mission complete.

The figure of Death, its regimented steps striding ever forward, was close now. It had taken hours. Hours of calling out to Death, talking, explaining, joking and then, finally, confessing. Now, with the suns low on the horizon, the jaundiced half-light of dusk was making it difficult to see Death in detail.

Stood on top of the TARDIS, its owner was rocking it under his feet. The drop in temperature had loosened the mud. He didn't expect it to suddenly pop up like a Jack-In-The-Box but it was worth trying to escape.

Two pinpricks of red shone out from under the black hood. Deaths eyes looked straight ahead and fixed on him.

"I never said I was right!" he shouted at Death. "I did what I did and I did it because I believed I was helping. There's no absolute right in battle. You know that. I'm exhausted. I don't know why I'm fighting anymore. I used to have a sense of purpose, but.." and he let

his hands drop to his sides.

Death, drawing closer in its metronome slow-march, lifted the scythe above its head as it became within distance of the desperate man on the TARDIS.

"Well," he said, his voice hoarse and thin. "I can't cheat you forever. Even though you can see me trying. I've cheated you many times before, though never to your face. But... all's fair in love and war. And I don't know whether I fell in love with war or it fell in love with me. But I'm ready. I'm ready for Death. Please. I want to sleep without hearing the screams."

Death, shimmering in the fading light of day, raised its scythe as high as it could go and the old man closed his eyes, opened his arms and raised his head to the sky. Time to go. Finally. The moment had come.

And, as he waited for the scythe to cut into him, bringing him welcome oblivion, desperately needed sleep, he thought about all the lives he had had, all the many friends he had known and how terribly and unjustly sad it was that he had let them all down. The war tearing the universe apart and here he was, about to die in the mud. He had failed everyone.

"Protocol #72. Search and locate. Attempt acquisition of machine." said the deep, booming, mechanical voice of Death as the scythe swung down and sliced through the cooling air. It hit the mud and flattened out, scooping a great chunk of it from the side of the TARDIS. The action was repeated, with quickening speed, to the point of it becoming a blur.

"You're not Death." sighed the Time Lord. "Do not go gentle into that good night..."

"Recognition approved. Unit 5 deployed. Approximately 22 minutes until pick-up. You have been saved."

"Have I?" said the weary, cracked voice that faded into the air. "You might say that, but I couldn't possibly comment."

The blue box began to emerge from its sticky grave.

The Beach

by Gary Russell

Tom screwed his eyes up, both against the glare of the morning sun, and also because he was trying to focus. Hard. Which wasn't easy – not just because of the sun but because the object of his attention kept moving.

Normally he wouldn't have worried about seeing some guy down on the beach – it wasn't exactly a private one, and once you negotiated the twisty-turny roads, it was quite easy to make your way to it via a couple of pathways.

No, what threw Tom was the big blue box, which the guy had come out of. Tom was pretty sure that hadn't been there the day before when everyone had arrived. After all, he tended to notice things like that. And even if he hadn't, then Lynda certainly would have. And talked about it. Endlessly. (Poor Jake, how did he cope with her?)

So Tom decided he had two choices – pop back to the house, tell Jake, Lynda and the Professor about the strange man and his strange blue box or, a far better option, go and investigate it himself.

Tom told himself this wasn't out of nosiness or even curiosity – it was more because if Professor Skellern discovered someone else was on "his" beach, there'd be hell to pay.

So Tom started down the short, sandy path to this end of the sea front, past the sign that warned about swimming and stuff and then onto the beach itself.

The man was still there, but he was sitting now, a few feet in front of his blue box (Tom could see it said something about policemen on it), staring out into the ocean.

'Hey,' Tom called gently. 'How are you?'

The man didn't face him but at least replied. 'I'm good. Thank you.' There was a pause, then an obvious afterthought. 'How are you?'

English, clearly. There a few English guys at uni, although they rarely sounded as insincere as this guy did.

Tom walked around, to face the man, hiding his view of the ocean. Weirdly, the guy just kept moving his head from side to side, trying to see around Tom. Tom looked over his shoulder, checking he wasn't actually blocking the man's view of anything in particular, but

nope, just ocean.

Nevertheless, Tom stepped to one side.

'Thank you,' said the man, twisting the edge of his moustache. 'I need to keep an eye on things.'

Tom frowned. 'It's the Pacific Ocean. Other than a few jellyfish, there's not much that comes inland. If you're looking for whales or dolphins, you'd be better round a couple of bays. Some great views from the top of the hill at Berragol.'

The man finally seemed to focus on Tom. 'I haven't come all this way to look at whales,' he said. 'Certainly not your boring ones.'

Tom shrugged. 'Australia's kind of famous for its views of whales actually,' he said.

The man looked back out to the seas. 'I've seen whales the size of Australia, flying between planets. Whales with entire planets on their backs. Whales with see-through skin. Whales leading pods of their kind into battle against the Dark Hordes of Mangolda.' He shrugged. 'Your whales, orcas and dolphins are desperately unimpressive in comparison.'

Tom stepped away. English. Therefore probably drunk. He certainly looked like he hadn't slept or shaved in a few weeks. His eyes were dark and ringed, sagging with tiredness, his hair way grey and wild. His clothes all looked like they'd seen better days too, although the weird bandoliers criss-crossing his chest were alarming, although he didn't seem to be carrying any ammo in them. He didn't seem to be holding a gun either.

'Why are you here?' the man asked Tom suddenly. 'I thought this was a bit off the beaten track.'

'It is,' Tom replied. 'Professor Skellern brings students here each year.'

'Skellern?' The strange trampish man seemed to be thinking, as if trying to remember the name. He said it a couple more times, getting his mouth around the word.

'You won't know him,' Tom said confidently. 'He's just a –'

'Professor of Marine Biology. Clive Skellern, born 1953, five foot nine, dark hair, wears terrible shoes. His wife Elizabeth, died in 1982. More importantly, Skellern has come every year to this exact beach, this exact spot in this exact week for the last decade. Have you ever asked him why? No, no of course you haven't. No one ever would.'

Tom stared. How did the man know all this? And more importantly, that Tom had never asked why. Which was odd, come to think of it. One of the other students he'd met who'd made this trip in earlier years never seemed to have asked either. In fact he couldn't recall anyone ever asking. 'What do you mean, "No one ever would"?'

The trampish man was already turned away from him. 'Go away,' he said. 'This is nothing to do with you.'

'And everything to do with me.'

Both Tom and the strange man turned at the new voice.

Professor Skellern was standing a few feet behind them.

'Skellern,' said the man on the beach. 'Here you are. Again.'

'I could say the same of you.' Skellern looked at Tom. 'I presume there's no point in telling you to go back to the house, is there Tom?'

'None at all,' Tom said. 'Sir,' he added. Just in case this affected his end of semester marks. He wondered how Lynda would feel, missing out on all this.

The old man on the beach, still facing the sea, waved an arm towards the two Australians. 'You might as well tell him, Professor. It's not like he'll understand. Any more than you do, really.'

Skellern walked across the sand towards Tom, who found he took an involuntary step backwards without knowing why. And for a second, Tom could swear that the professor's eyes…changed. As if they bulged fractionally, and glowed with a…a luminescence of some sort. But that was mad!

Skellern smiled. 'Whoops, I slipped up,' he said loudly – and Tom knew he was addressing the other man, not him.

'Your eyes…?'

'Might as well let it go, professor,' called back the man. 'It's time the debt was paid.'

Professor Skellern walked past Tom, who turned his head to see what happened next. For some reason he couldn't move.

He looked down. His feet were slightly sunk into the sand which he didn't remember happening. And there was some kind of seaweed around his ankles. Where had that come from?

Skellern raised his right arm, pointing out to the water with it, but kept his gaze on the stranger. At least Tom assumed so, he couldn't see his tutor's face because… because he couldn't bloody move! 'What's going on?' he heard himself yell.

'It's for your own good, Tom,' Skellern replied without looking back. 'You'll thank me later.'

'Sooner,' corrected the stranger.

Tom saw Skellern shrug. And then he followed where Skellern was pointing – and realized with a shock that he water was…moving. Splitting aside, like a giant invisible hand was parting the waves, Moses-style.

And there, on the now-muddy seafloor where seconds before had been the water that was now kept from crashing back down by and invisible wall of…invisibleness, was a coffin. Or container of some sort, but definitely coffin-shaped.

But translucent. There was something inside it. A body?

The strange man strode towards the coffin-thing as if water-held-back-by-nothing

was an everyday occurrence.

Tom took a deep breath. 'Anyone want to tell me what's going on?'

'No,' both men replied together.

'Sort of guessed that was going to be the answer." Tom reached down, trying to yank the seaweed off his ankles, so he could extract his feet from under the sand and go investigate. But Skellern looked back, and Tom raised his head enough to catch the professor's eyes. Sure enough, they were all weird and fishy again. Skellern smiled and Tom watched as his neck swelled up, thin slits appearing on either side, pulsating as he breathed.

'I'm guessing you're probably not Professor Skellern,' Tom said.

The stranger in the dry ocean looked back and pointed at the coffin 'No, he's here waiting to be woken up again.' He looked back at the strange hybrid fishy-Skellern on the beach. 'Time's up.'

'Why should I?'

'Because that was the deal,' the stranger said, kneeling down, trying to open the coffin. 'Because I got you a whole decade in return for your loss.'

Tom wondered if that was a reference to Elizabeth, the Professor's dead wife, but that was far more than ten years ago. And anyway, it didn't seem that was the case.

"Professor Skellern" walked to the edge of the beach, and angrily gesticulated at the stranger. 'Oh, and you decided to come and get me, break out of your little bubble existence, for what? Revenge? Arrogance? Because you woke up today and decided the Daleks were right?'

The stranger sighed and stopped whatever he was doing to the coffin lid. He wearily looked across at Skellern and even from this distance Tom could see this was an argument he'd had before. As Tom watched, it was like he aged twenty years in a second just from the effort of remaining patient.

And Tom realised that the man was gazing between "the Professor" and him! He was telling Tom, explaining to Tom, what was going on. Justifying it even?

'The War has stretched on for an eternity. Maybe two since you've been here. I now know how to stop it.'

'Put it right?' asked "Skellern".

The stranger shook his head. 'End it. Forever. But at a cost. Before I do that, I have… loose ends to tie up. Skellern is one of them.'

And the coffin lid popped open and a second later, Professor Skellern sat upright, blinking in the light.

He looked straight at the older man. 'Did it go wrong?'

Then he glanced towards the beach and saw his weird fishy double and stared open-mouthed. 'No,' he breathed. 'No, it worked didn't it?'

The old man nodded. 'Ten years. To the minute.'

'It feels like I've been in there ten seconds. I thought maybe the deal was off.'

'I told you it'd pass in the blink of an eye.' The old man helped Skellern out.

The fishy Skellern threw Tom a look. 'See, Tom? See this is what the universe has to offer.' He pointed at the older man. 'That man there is a warrior, *the* Warrior, you might call him. And his fight destroyed my world – dried it out in moments, murdered my entire species. But me? I was off-world, a trade-agreement with another planet that was obliterated as I flew away from it. So how did that leave me? Orphaned, the last-survivor, the only one of an entire species left in the universe. And you know what this Warrior did? He brought me here, away from his nasty little war because by rights I ought to have died. But he "accidentally" saved me, materialized his ship around mine but apparently broke something he called the laws of time.' The not-Professor-Skellern-thing gurgled a laugh. 'Like a Time War can have Laws!'

Tom frowned. 'I don't…'

'Understand? No, no how could you? Humans are so parochial, so insignificant. I'm not human, Tom!'

'I kind of guessed that,' Tom muttered.

And in a blur of movement, like a dog shaking itself after a swim, "Professor Skellern" on the beach shook off his…professor-ness and in his place stood a creature like Tom had never seen. It's body glistened and glittered with rainbow colours, covered as it was in billions of tiny oily fish scales. Humanoid in shape, two arms, two legs, but clearly more fish than human, the head was like a giant catfish, bulbous eyes blinking, gills on the neck puffing out.

The old man took up the story. 'His people had to die, that was the natural order of things. But the war accidentally saved him and I made him a promise. I'd find him a life, a long way from the War he should have never known about, until I was ready to bring the War to a close. Then he would have to return to the exact point in time and space where I had saved him.'

'And die.' That was the real (at least Tom assumed he was real) Professor Skellern, now out of the coffin.

The Warrior or whoever he was pointed a small pen-like thing at the coffin and suddenly it began to fill with water.

The human Skellern trudged towards Tom, hand held out and Tom shook it as he reached him. Tom could feel his feet being released from their sandy prison.

Skellern pointed at the old Warrior. 'I knew the Doc -…I knew that man from years ago. We had faced dark terrors and survived. But it had cost me my wife and then my

health – and knowing I only had a few weeks left, he asked me to swap places with this fish gentleman until their deal was over. He got to live the decade that I was never destined to see. Just ten years. He could have had a lot more as far as I was concerned.'

'And now?'

Skellern smiled. 'Now I am awake and will no doubt die in a few weeks as I should have done ten years ago.'

The old man was leading the fish alien into the coffin. 'The universe is cruel, Tom. Things have their time, then it's over and there's not much we can do about it.' He looked at the shape-changing fish alien. 'But although I can occasionally bend the rules, I can never totally break them.'

The fish-creature gave Tom one last look. 'I feel like a prisoner of war being taken to be shot like a deserter.'

'That's not fair,' the old Warrior said.

'Isn't it?' the alien said. 'Sorry to hurt your feelings, Warrior, but that's how I see it. Thanks for the decade.' Then he looked at Skellern. 'But to you Professor I mean, genuinely, thanks for the decade. I have enjoyed being you.'

He stepped into the coffin and the old Warrior lowered the lid then ran to the beach as, after a second or two, the ocean crashed down, no longer held back by the amazing alien's invisible watery powers.

He walked up to the blue police box, then stopped and dug into his jacket's inner pocket, bringing out an envelope and held it out. Tom staggered over (his ankles had pins and needles) and reached for it. 'When I'm gone,' said the old man, 'give it to Professor Skellern with my…gratitude.' He smiled. 'Once upon a time, in a different life, he thought me a savior, a strong man, someone who fought for the underdog. This war has changed me in more ways than one. My morals have become…scrambled, and are very shortly going to get worse. I want him to remember me as I once was.'

He pressed the letter into Tom's hand and vanished inside his box.

A moment later, amidst a horrible noise, the blue box simply faded away, reappeared a few metres out into the sea, where the coffin had to be, then vanished again. For good this time.

Tom looked back at Skellern, who was staring at the empty space in the ocean where it had been.

Tom walked over and gave the envelope to him.

Skellern ripped it open.

It contained two things. A photograph and a newspaper cutting.

The photo showed Skellern and a younger man in a long green velvet coat, long brown hair and a silver cravat climbing the Sydney Harbor Bridge. On it was written "This

man is gone forever, please remember him and live his ideals."

Skellern shrugged. 'How am I supposed to do that, Doctor? What have you done, what have you become?' He looked at Tom. 'I think he has rather let me down.'

Tom not understanding any of it at all, unwrapped the newspaper cutting. It was from two years previously. Tom looked up at Skellern and showed it to him. 'Maybe not. Is this what you suffer from?'

Skellern read, his eyes widening. 'They…they found a cure?' He looked back across to the ocean. 'He knew. He knew if I had ten years, I could be cured in a way I couldn't have been ten years ago. That's why he chose ten years for the swap – it was enough for a cure to be found.'

Tom was staring out into the ocean and then up into the sky.

Somewhere, god knew where, he was going to bring his War to an end. But Tom had to wonder, at what cost? He had looked so scared, so…haunted – and all Tom could think was he was glad he didn't know him any better, like Professor Skellern had done apparently.

Because then he couldn't feel let down by an old friend like Skellern seemed to be.

The two men walked off the beach. And Tom was pretty sure Skellern would never come back.

But he was also pretty sure he would. Just in case the old Warrior ever came back…

The Moments In Between

by George Mann

The TARDIS console sighed plaintively, like a tired old lady who'd had her fill of the world, exhausted by the endless bickering of her grandchildren.

Cinder couldn't blame her. War had a way of doing that, of wearing people down. She'd seen it so many times on Moldox, people numbed by the incessant horrors, eroded by the ever-present threat of death. People who'd started out full of fury and ire, idealistic and free, who'd kept on going until there was nothing left of them but a hollow, weary husk.

She supposed it might be true of machines, too. Well, machines as miraculous and seemingly independent as the Doctor's battered old blue box, at least.

The Doctor was hunched over the controls, his eyebrows knitted in a heavy frown. She watched for a moment as his fingers danced over a keyboard and little glowing sigils appeared on a display. He was running a calculation, she decided, and didn't much like the look of the results.

He didn't appear to have noticed her. She scratched at the back of her neck at the spot where the label on her borrowed t-shirt was irritating her.

"Bad news?" she said.

No response. She crossed the console room from the base of the steps until she reached one of the railings around the dais. She leaned against it, watching the Doctor.

After a moment he lifted his head and glanced over. He blinked, as if seeing her for the first time. "Hmmm?" he said.

"I asked if it was bad news. On the screen."

"Is there ever anything else, these days?" he said.

"I wouldn't know," she said. "I can't remember the last time I heard some good news, or saw something beautiful. The only thing we celebrate on Moldox is the successful destruction of another Dalek." She laughed, but her heart wasn't in it.

The Doctor frowned. He seemed to consider for a moment, before stepping back from the console and waving her forward. "Come with me," he said. He set off for the

staircase leading up to the second floor.

With a shrug, Cinder did as he said. “Where are we going?”

“To see something beautiful,” he said.

He led her through corridors lined with exquisite paintings of ancient galleons battling rabid, frothing waves; across the piazza, where he trailed his fingers in the crystal clear waters of the fountain; through the heart of a gnarly old wood, thick with the cloying odour of damp earth. He marched her over a flower bed overflowing with a carpet of aluminium leaves; down the side of a gorge that he told her reminded him of any number of alien worlds; through a bookshop without any staff, dusty with the weight of ages; along a gallery lined with a hundred ticking clocks, arguing noisily with one another as they meted out the seconds.

Finally, after almost an hour of this, he stopped in the mouth of a brightly lit corridor. “Here we are,” he said, with an expansive wave of his hands.

The corridor was like something out of an Arabian dream; a narrow, crooked

passageway, with broken, irregular flagstones, and lanterns dangling from above, strung from a web work of cables.

The walls on both sides were lined with doors. Cinder had to blink to make sure she wasn't seeing things. There were so many of them – ancient, studded double doors of limed wood; towering, fortified gates banded with vicious-looking spikes; tiny, child-sized archways; stable doors, office doors – the list went on. They were entirely mismatched, drawn from different epochs of architectural style. Some of them looked as if they were centuries old, others as if they'd just had a fresh lick of paint. She counted at least a dozen on either side, before the passage extended away into the indiscernible distance.

Overhead, birds wheeled against a pure, unblemished sky, squawking loudly to one another as they danced.

"What is this place?" said Cinder. "Have we landed?"

"No, we're still on the ship," said the Doctor. He was grinning. It was one of the first times she'd seen him smile with anything but grim satisfaction.

"But…look at the sky! It's so clear and blue. Are you *sure* we're not on a planet?" She stared at the Doctor for a moment, and then jumped up and down on the spot, as if testing the integrity of the ground.

"How did you do it?" she said, when she was sure he wasn't going to answer.

The Doctor laughed. "I didn't. And if you think *this* is impressive, wait until you see what's behind those doors."

"So all of that, those…*rooms* and woods and clocks – they weren't what you meant when you mentioned something beautiful?"

The Doctor nodded toward the nearest door. "Take a peek," he said.

Tentatively, unsure what to expect, Cinder approached the door. It looked heavy, made from ancient, weathered oak and crumbling bands of black iron. A church door, she decided.

"Go on," urged the Doctor. "I promise it's safe."

Catching her breath, she took the handle and pulled the door open.

For a moment she had to shield her eyes from the sudden glare. She peered through the gaps between her fingers, trying to discern what was there.

Inside the room was what could only be described as a primordial landscape. Giant ferns lolled in a gentle breeze, and twin stars burned like hot pinpricks in the sky. Closer, like an immense bauble hanging over the horizon, was gentle curve of another, neighbouring world.

The ground beneath her boots was dry, crumbling mud, as she slowly crept through the door. The air here was hot, and it burned her lungs, but she filled them with it anyway, taking it all in. She looked to the heavens, marvelling at the scudding pink clouds and the

aquamarine sky.

"Careful!" called the Doctor from beside her, catching her elbow to stop her turning her ankle in a large, water-filled depression in the ground. She looked down, and saw sparkling shapes zipping through the water, colliding with one another and combining, then shooting off again, describing figures of eight just below the surface. She watched them for a moment as they danced.

"There. Beautiful, isn't it?" said the Doctor.

"Yes…I…" Cinder struggled to find the words. "What is it?"

"The cradle of the Sense Sphere," said the Doctor. "The very moment it came into being. Here, in this pond, is the birth of the Sensorites. One day great civilisations will rise here, spanning worlds. An Empire of the mind."

"I don't understand," said Cinder. "You said we were still on the ship. But we *can't* be! I mean – there's a planet hanging there in the sky, and two suns!"

The Doctor chuckled. "It's complicated," he said. "There're not really here…and yet they are."

"So this is like a three-dimensional photograph, a snapshot?" said Cinder. "One that we can walk about in."

"No," said the Doctor. "This is the very moment itself, plucked from the eye of destruction. A frozen second, ripped from the fabric of time. A beautiful thing, snatched up and saved from the indifferent devastation of the war."

"But...why?"

"Preservation," said the Doctor. "Nostalgia. Freedom. A sense of right and wrong. A second chance. A small rebellion."

They stood in silence, looking down at the tiny creatures flitting about in the water.

"There's more," said the Doctor, after a while. "Come on, pick another door."

More doors – big ones, small ones, lopsided and narrow ones – led to more wonders. The first breath of winter on a parched micro-world; the moment a Menoptra first took wing; dew drops on Dartmoor; the awakening of the Nestene Consciousness; the spark of sentience in a Bakri synth; the birth of a TARDIS; a heliosphere; the rites of a Sarkovian death march being read on a constant loop; an Arkos awakening from its chrysalis. The list went on. No matter how many doors she opened, behind each and every one was a frozen second, a fragment saved from the death days of the universe.

Breathless – knowing she could go on looking forever and still not reach the end of the passageway – she stopped, flopping back against the wall. The ragged bricks dug into her back, but she didn't care. She felt elated.

"You did all of this?" she said, as the Doctor ambled over to catch up with her. He was smiling, but the sadness had returned to his eyes.

He shook his head. "No, not me," he said. "I found it here one day." He patted the wall gently. "This is what she does, in the moments in between."

"The moments in between?" echoed Cinder.

"The still points. The moments like now, amidst the fighting and all the dashing about. Whenever I pause to catch my breath," said the Doctor.

"Who does it?" Cinder was confused. Was there someone else onboard the TARDIS, someone she hadn't met yet? Is *that* why the Doctor had brought her here? It would make sense – the bedrooms full of clothes, the borrowed T-shirt. It had to belong to someone.

The Doctor creased his brow. He looked wistful. "The TARDIS," he said. "The TARDIS does it. That's what I meant, when I mentioned her little acts of rebellion. She doesn't approve of all the fighting. So whenever she gets chance, she snatches up these little moments and hides them here, like a magpie."

"You talked about a second chance," said Cinder.

"I think that's what she's hoping for," said the Doctor. "A second chance, for all of us; an opportunity to put things right. With these she'll have something to rebuild, once the war's over." He smiled, sadly. "Seeds to coax the universe back to life again."

Cinder let that sink in for a moment. It was remarkable. "You're right," she said.

"I am?"

"It *is* beautiful."

She looked up at the sound of the TARDIS engines groaning.

"Another door," said the Doctor, pointing down the crooked passageway to a small portal that had opened in the wall. This time it looked like the door of a homestead from Moldox. She felt her stomach lurch. "Go and take a look."

"Maybe in a moment," said Cinder.

"You could stay here, if you like? Explore for a while. I'm sure she wouldn't mind. She seems to like you." He met her gaze and held it steady. "You don't have to come back with me. To the fighting. To all that death. You've done enough. You deserve this. It's peaceful here."

Cinder had to admit, the thought was tempting. *No more fighting*. But how could she go on, knowing that the Daleks were still out there, that the battle was raging all about her, people dying? That wasn't a choice she could make. "And become another of the things she's collected?" she said. "Another frozen moment, waiting for a chance to live again?"

"There are worse things," said the Doctor. "You don't have to go on."

“Neither do you,” she said. “They’re not your responsibility, whatever you might think. You have choices too.”

The Doctor laughed. “Touché.”

“Come on,” said Cinder. “We’ve got things to do. I want to blow up some more Daleks.” She pushed herself away from the wall, hooked her arm through the Doctor’s, and led him away.

He stopped after a moment, glancing back over his shoulder. “What about the new door? Don’t you want to see what’s inside? It looks like one of yours, from Moldox.”

“It’ll keep,” she said. “I’ll be back soon enough.”

Together, the Doctor and Cinder strolled off along the quiet lane. Behind them, the TARDIS engines issued a long, peaceful sigh.

Prologue - The Horde of Travesties

by Declan May

From his vantage position high up on the hills overlooking the sprawling stain of Fascinating Cardinalage, the Doctor watched as the Refugee Pods zipped up into the air, buzzing like angry wasps, spinning with agility through the fourteen platinum spires of the Cathedralium, up into the red sky and out into space and to safety in the Quantum Panacea …

Probably.

There was a one in thirteen percent chance that the Daleks would blast the Refugee Pods – basic WarpSpinners retrofitted with blacklightspeed engines - the moment they crossed the System Perimeter. The enemy had, most certainly, discovered that something was going on. There were spies all around. Careless talk costs lives, and tongues loosened by torture were something not even the mighty Time Lords, in all their power and glory, could prevent.

Yes, thought the Doctor. *There will be blood today*…

The last of the WarpSpinners zoomed up into the atmosphere, passing the Sky Trenches, and disappeared from view. *That's three-hundred and fifty thousand people*, the Doctor sighed. *Oh well, not much to be done about it now*. He clapped his hands, turned on his heel and walked back towards the TARDIS.

How long had it been since Karn? In real terms? Days? Weeks? Months?

He wasn't sure. All a muddy, messy and mysterious nauseous blur of places and people and battles and blood…

This new body was strong. Young. Full of fire, ferocity and fuel for the fight. His last body, his eighth incarnation, couldn't have fought in this war. He knew that. Too weak, too kind, too *Doctorish*.

So, the Doctor was dead. Yes. That much was certain. Gone in an incandescent blaze of excruciating agony, the natural process of regeneration – which *always* hurt – augmented and intensified by the Sisterhood Of Karn and their distortion of Time Lord

science, burning away the flesh and bone of that good Doctor and forcing this cruel, twisted tailor-made naissance upon his shadow.

But necessary.

The Doctor was dead. Doctor no more. He'd had a good run, the old boy. Nearly one thousand years of being the healer, the helper, the hero. Never giving up, never giving in. Never cruel or cowardly. Moving through space and time in his beautiful blue Police Box, travelling the wrong way, travelling sideways, underways, aboveways… Cutting through chronology like Burroughs through a bible, riotously ripping the rulebook of Time, tearing out its pages, crossing out its errors and filling-up the spaces in between with an untidy scrawl belonging to eight different pairs of hands…

All those years. All those days. After Karn, after the Sisterhood, he'd gone to Earth. The Earth still needed protecting from the worst effects of the War. Only he was able to protect her, his beloved blue and green planet, keep her timelines preserved in aspic and make sure that her past, present and future remained unmolested, unviolated by the Bastards Of Skaro, kept safe from the prying eyes and wandering hands of a Gallifrey, spoiled in the heat of war and turned into a desperate, treacherous, brutal beast.

To Earth, then. To find the Chronosmiths, that ancient Time Lord sect who traded in time, skimmed minutes from the days and stopped the years from spilling over. The Chronosmiths of Mount Perdition, a band of thirteen nonconformists, cranks and oddities who had left Gallifrey long before the days of Rassilon, Omega, the Vantour, Sepisirrus, and set up their Chrono Atelier in a dying hotel, hidden between a bar and a bookshop in one of the winding, tight streets of the Bari Gotic in Barcelona.

The thirteen Chronosmiths (names are unimportant, but, in this case, worth sharing: Wigs, Rags, Hynchcliffe, Sheepskin, Plunder, the Baronessa, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, Spinach, Thurber, Myopapa and the Cigarette Crow) received him, then, and heard him out. *Would they,* he asked them, *hide the Earth from the Time War*?

- *In exchange for what?* asked Precedent. *What can you give in return?*

- *I am in no position to barter,* the Time Lord said. *There is a war that will destroy all of time and space, yourselves included.*

- *We shall be perfectly fine*, sqwaked the Baronessa. *We can remove ourselves from time and space at a moment's notice! (We* can *do that, can't we?)*

- *Nowhere is safe*, the Time Lord said*. But places* can *be made safer. Which is why I am asking you. Nicely.*

- *A threat, Time Lord*, said the Cigarette Crow. *Veiled, covered, but a threat nonetheless. We do not take kindly to threats. You should know that. We are artisans, skilled in the arts of time manipulation. The notion of war is distasteful to us. We cannot choose a side.*

- *I will give you whatever you want, whatever you need*, the Time Lord said. *If it's within my power, I shall give it. Then, I shall return to the fight and ensure that it never*

reaches the shores of the solar system.

- An undertaking of such magnitude… Jargon said. *Hiding the Earth and her history (both past and future) from the jaws of the Time War… we would need a lot of temporal energy. Just think of all those minutes and hours and days and decades and centuries… for it would cost the clout of several hundred years to power this proposal of yours ...*

- Et, précisément, continued Plunder. *La seule moyenne pour obtenir un tel pouvoir c'est de prendre les années d'un Seigneur du Temps.*

- To take the years from a Time Lord, said Sheepskin. *Take his days, both good and bad. Take his years, his months. Take his path through history. His adventures. Yes… that is what it would take.*

- And who has more years to give, years to lose, said Rags. *Than the Doctor himself…*

And a deal was struck. Doctor no more, so no more left to lose. The Chronosmiths took his years, his hundreds of years. They took his canon, his chronology and wrought from it, wrung from it the stories, the tales, the years of adventure… Leaving some things, throwing away others, scattering whole decades out onto the fierce majesty of the time winds…

The Doctor, a name he used no longer, felt his history fall away and he tried very hard not to scream in pain as the years were torn from him and his age diminished.

1000…

932…

750…

400…

- I think, said the Cigarette Crow. *We can stop there. We have enough. More than enough*.

-The Earth is safe then?

- More or less. We cannot guarantee one-hundred percent effectiveness. There'll still be the odd invasion, incursion, attack or conspiracy. But it'll do for now.

It'll do for now…

FADE IN:

01.EXT. TIME VORTEX EVERYTIME

In the reddish green swirl and weave of the time vortex a maltreated BLUE POLICE BOX spins violently through clouds of tachyon dust, scattering particles of minutes, years, decades, dispersing them on the time-winds. The lantern atop the Police

Box is glowing fierce white; a comet-like blur cutting through the fog of temporal particulate, slicing through fields of "impossible pasts" and "improbable futures" like a hot knife through butter...

02. INT.TARDIS – CONSOLE ROOM. EVERYTIME

An impossibly large, high ceilinged baroque-looking chamber. This is the CONSOLE ROOM. Like a dying library or a ransacked chapel, the place is a study in wanton desecration: chairs overturned... a wrecked handstand... books scattered everywhere, their spines snapped and their pages torn out... The mushroom shaped console split open, its glass and brass battered and broken.

A man with an old/young elfin face, dark serious eyes and matt of untidy dark hair. He is wearing a long dark coat (belonging to his predecessor) and there's a brown-leather bandolier strung across his chest.

He sits, back against the "stem" of the ruined console, staring forward, lost...

Several hundred years later, relatively speaking, the blue Police Box hurtles through the Vortex, its pilot resolute, steel in his hearts and determination in his eyes as he turns the dial on the console, setting the coordinates for home. And all the while, flowing through him like a toxin, two simple words. Just two. Unthinkable all those years ago, but now the only option left remaining in a universe where, as each relative second passed, another reality burnt out of all existence. Just two simple words, yet heavy with the weight of intent and magnitude.

"No more."

But the old man (and he is an old man now) is suddenly thrown to the floor with a crash. The TARDIS shakes.

He pulls himself up, grasping the sides of the console for leverage. An indicator on the console is flashing. There is something, impossibly, blocking the vortex. He cannot move! His TARDIS is frozen, stuck in a Temporal Eddy or a Vortisimal Breach or a –

"Doctor,"

A voice from nowhere, echoing around the console room. A voice he recognises from somewhere. Somewhere long, long ago.

Speaking aloud, he says: "That isn't my name. It hasn't been for a long time."

"Oh I know that, Doctor." the voice is smooth, the intonation wry and precise. "But that's the only name I've ever known you by."

"Who are you?" the Time Lord says. "And what have you done to the vortex? To my TARDIS?"

The door of his TARDIS opens.

Impossible! In the vortex? In mid-flight?

They file into the console room. Thirteen of them. Hideously disfigured creatures, their heads swollen to impossible, misshaped proportions. Bared teeth, bloody scars, hands twisted into claws. They shuffle and limp towards the Time Lord. Instinctively, he reaches for the sonic screwdriver in his bandolier. For all the good it would do against these monstrosities…

They form a chain around him. A circle. Around both Time Lord and console.

Then – and he doesn't know why – he feels it. He recognises them.

Thirteen.

Names are, of course, unimportant. But, in this case, worth sharing: Wigs, Rags, Hynchcliffe, Sheepskin, Plunder, the Baronessa, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, Spinach, Thurber, Myopapa and the Cigarette Crow.

The Chronosmiths.

"My god," the Time Lord says. "What has happened to you..?"

"I did, Doctor." says that voice again.

The Chronosmiths shift nervously as, in through the TARDIS door, a man enters. He closes the door carefully behind himself. Locks it. He walks calmly and casually towards them.

The Time Lord knows him. From where? From when? A small, bearded man with close cropped brown-grey hair and wearing a pair of little round spectacles. He is in a uniform adorned with strange pumps and pipes and valves and embellishments.

"The War Lord!" says the Doctor, staggering back against his console. "But that's impossible…"

"Yet here I am, Doctor." He says quietly. Smiling. "It was only a matter of time. I've been watching your…*war* with great interest, I must say. Been watching you for a very long time."

The Time Lord and the War Lord stare at one another. How much has changed since they last met.

"Now Doctor," the War Lord continues. "You've seen my little band of bodyguards. Just a small demonstration of what I've been up to. I have great plans for you, Doctor. Great plans indeed."

"I told you: that is not my name." the Time Lord replies. "Do not call me that."

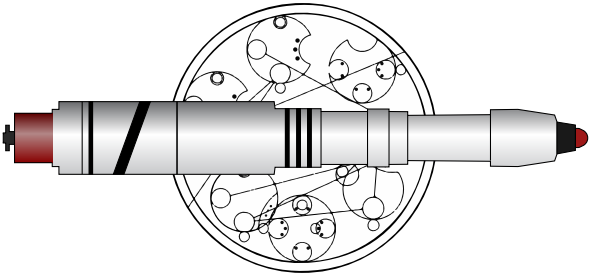
The War Lord throw back his head and laughs.

A laugh that stops abruptly. His face suddenly, deadly serious, his eyes blazing.

"For you, good soldier, the War is over. I am going to need your great military mind at my side" He says, voice cold, metallic. "For I have unleashed the Horde of Travesties, and the Time War has only just begun…"

THE WAR DOCTOR WILL RETURN IN…

SEASONS OF WAR 2



The Director's Tale

by Andy Robinson

"What are you up to tomorrow?" my wife asks. "Filming a Dalek", I reply.

This has been a fairly typical exchange in the Robinson household since I've taken on the 'Seasons of War' short film project, several months ago.

It all began with a simple Facebook message from friend & fellow 'Doctor Who' fan, Simon Brett. In his mind, a simple 30 second audio-visual piece of some kind was all that was required to promote the book. I don't think he quite realised what he would end up getting, by asking me...

In a way, Simon's message was the call I'd been waiting most of my adult life for. It's no secret to those who know me that it's been a dream of mine to direct an episode of 'Doctor Who'. I suppose a part of me was thinking, "This might be the closest you'll ever get, sunshine, so you'd better make it the experience you wanted. And make it good".

Making it good was a prerequisite because it had to please both the filmmaker and the fan in me. My Dad tells me that, like many other children watching the show, I used to hide behind the Sofa - not because of the monsters, but the theme music. Once that had finished, I would emerge and watch the episode. Now as a Dad who has watched the series with my daughter, I feel I have come full circle - and my relationship with the show has only deepened - especially since being tasked with creating my own version of it.

Declan's outline for the War Doctor was so well-defined, that I came up with a structure very quickly. I realised what we had in my story was a western - a mysterious man with no name, and a person who is shaped by their encounters with him. The film 'Shane' was a huge influence, and the iconography of the western is there for people to find in the film. In our trailer, the War Doctor is practically a gunslinger - preparing for battle.

I'm glad to say that I was not the only one to hear the siren call of the TARDIS when it came to making this film. I could not have done any of this without the collaboration of the actors & crew - they are all deservedly credited elsewhere in this book. Thank you for your brilliance & dedication.

The 'Doctor Who' that we see on our TV screens is made by true fans who deeply love & care about the series - and this film & anthology are no different. That love is the

thing that unites us from whatever corner of the planet we come from (can a planet have corners..?)

So whether or not I get a chance to direct an episode of 'Doctor Who' in the future, only the madman in the Blue Box knows. But thanks to this project, the prospect of doing so no longer fills me with terror.

I've come out from behind the sofa.

Andy Robinson, Exeter, 2015

About the Contributors

DECLAN MAY is an author, scriptwriter, screenwriter, producer and editor. He has been a full-time writer since 2003, and has worked on a wide variety of TV shows and films both in France and in the UK. A writer of sketch comedy and sitcoms, his work has appeared on BBC One and BBC Two. Currently developing a screenplay about the life of Dirk Bogarde, working on several concurrent television, film and book projects as well as a *bande dessine*, and in the planning stages of launching a magazine, he somehow finds the time to write third-person potted biographies of himself for *Doctor Who* charity books. Find him on www.declanmay.com

SIMON BRETT (@simonbrett) is an illustrator, designer, musician, broadcaster, husband, father and most recently a fiction writer. He regularly illustrates for Starburst Magazine along with Cygnus Alpha fanzine, and presents 3 different radio shows on Exeter's Phonic FM radio station. These are all available to listen again at www.mixcloud.com. He is also a regular member of Starburst Magazine's Blue Box Podcast, downloadable from iTunes, and has arranged three different versions of the podcast's theme during it's run. His artwork can also be found in *You & Who: Contact Has Been Made Volume 2*, *The 12 Doctors Of Christmas* and *Blake's Heaven*, and he regularly attends science fiction conventions as an artist. Simon's writing credits are multiple contributions for both volumes of *You & Who: Contact Has Been Made,* along with *The Stocking Fillers*, a tenth Doctor story for *The 12 Doctors Of Christmas* charity Doctor Who anthology.

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WARREN FREY is a writer and journalist based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. During the day he shoots video and writes stories for a trade newspaper, but by night he spins flights of fantasy and horror armed only with a Macbook Air. He's probably best known in fan circles as one of the three hosts of *Radio Free Skaro*, one of the most popular Doctor Who podcasts on the web.

NICHOLAS HOLLANDS was originally a computer programmer, but has recently discovered a talent for document layout, graphic design and typesetting that he didn't know he had. He helps produce the fanzine Cygnus Alpha, as well as the various charity anthologies that have come out of that stable. A life-long Who fan, he has also contributed some articles for the book *Hating to Love*, as well some fan reminiscences in *Blake's Heaven*, both from Watching Books.

JOHN DAVIES has contributed to a number of anthologies, both as a writer and editor. His first break came when he was commissioned by Big Finish to write *Dear John* for 'The Centenarian' entry in their Short Trips range. This was followed by *Plight of the Monkrah* for Snapshots and *Séance* for Defining Patterns. Since then he has written for both volumes of *You and Who - Contact Has Been Made* books and is a regular contributor to Cygnus Alpha fanzine, with whom he both wrote for and edited a charity Christmas anthology in 2013 called *The Twelve Doctors of Christmas*, and the Doctor Who Appreciation Society's *Celestial Toyroom* magazine. He has also contributed to *Shockeye's Kitchen*. In addition to *Seasons of War*, he is currently working on a book celebrating fans' love for Blake's 7 *Blake's Heaven* and an anthology of Amicus inspired horror stories entitled *Terrors of the Theatre Diabolique* which was released in 2014.

ANDY ROBINSON is an Exeter-based Writer/Director, and the person behind the *Seasons of War* short film. Originally from East London (born half a mile from where another East-ender, Alfred Hitchcock, grew up), Andy fell in love with both the still & moving image from an early age. He later gained a degree in Graphic Design from the University of Plymouth - specialising in Photography. Post-graduation, Andy gravitated towards filmmaking - assisting on low-budget productions as well as making his own. After moving to Devon, Andy embarked on making what became Exeter's first independently-produced feature film - *The Forewarning*, and since then he has made a number of short films that have screened on the film festival circuit. Most recently *Keepsake* - a love story about a couple dealing with the impact of Alzheimer's, was selected for the Plymouth International Film Festival. Andy is currently working on a screenplay for his second feature film, called *Synchronicity*, and having most definitely dipped his toe in the water with *Seasons of War*,

he is more determined than ever to direct an episode of *Doctor Who* someday...

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Momo:tempo is the music project of English south coast creative, producer and arty wordist **TIMO PEACH [Composer and performer the music on the soundtrack of the accompanying *Seasons Of War* film]**. As well as Momo's original artist recordings, he also composes for television, film, theatre and fine art projects, and occasionally even appears in some colourful live outings with the lively Momo:tempo Electro Pops Orchestra. Drawing on some broad creative influences, from Art Pop to Krautrock, electro-swing theatre to spoken work score, Momo:tempo has, despite Mr Peach's best efforts, an unmistakeable creative voice throughout its work, all emanating from a glorified shed in Bournemouth. Momo is about to follow up his eclectic 2010 electro-pop epic *The Golden Age Of Exploration*, with his second LP. Visit www.momotempo.co.uk to find out more.

ANDREW SMITH's first professional writing was for radio and TV comedy sketch shows while he was still at school. In 1980, aged 17, he was commissioned to write a four-part story, *Full Circle,* for Tom Baker's final season as *Doctor Who.* Further writing included plays for TV and radio, and contributions to several comedy sketch shows, including *Not The 9 O'Clock News* and *A Kick Up The Eighties.* He also penned the novelisation of his *Doctor Who* story. In 1984 he joined London's Metropolitan Police, from which he retired as a Chief Inspector in 2014. In recent years he has returned to writing, principally audio dramas for Big Finish Productions. Andrew was born and raised in Glasgow but now lives in London with his family.

LEE RAWLINGS is a father, Radio DJ, professional Comedy waiter, musician, actor, event organiser, librarian, fanzine editor and a writer. His latest contributions of fiction include short stories for *The Terrors of the Théatre Diabolique* and *The 12 Doctors of Christmas*, and non fiction pieces are included in *You and Who: Contact Has Been Made*, *Blake's Heaven* and Cygnus Alpha fanzine.

J.R. SOUTHALL is a columnist for Starburst Magazine and host of their Blue Box Podcast, as well as being a cat-loving, tea-drinking postman. His favourite film is *A Matter of Life and Death* and he once lost his head at five o'clock on a wintry morning and had to carry it all the way to A&E in the dark. When he grows up - as if that will ever happen - he would like to be a television pilot.

Blue Box Podcast:
http://www.starburstmagazine.com/doctor-who-podcast-episodes

Watching Books:
http://watchingbooks.weebly.com/

DAN BARRATT has worked in the theatre for many years as a director, actor, singer and designer and has contributed work to the BBC Design Department at Television Centre and at BBC Elstree. In 2003, Dan appeared alongside Colin Baker's Doctor in the Big Finish

audio drama, *Doctor Who & The Pirates* directed by Barnaby Edwards. He later went on to work on both the 2005 and 2006 television series of Doctor Who as a Dalek Operator on the stories, *Bad Wolf*, *Parting Of The Ways*, *Army Of Ghosts* and *Doomsday*. Among Dan's writing credits are contributions to the anthologies *The Twelve Doctors Of Christmas*, *Blake's Heaven* and *Terrors Of The Théâtre Diabolique*, a horror anthology project based on the films of the legendary Amicus Studios. Dan is a presenter on the Exeter based radio station, Phonic fm co-presenting the film and television soundtrack show, *Sound & Vision*.

PAUL MAGRS lives and writes in Manchester. In a twenty year writing career he has published a number of novels in a variety of genres, including books about transtemporal adventuress Iris Wildthyme and also the Brenda and Effie Mysteries, which are about the Bride of Frankenstein running a B&B in the seaside town of Whitby. He has also written fiction for young adults, including *Strange Boy*, *Exchange* and most recently, *Lost on Mars* (Firefly Press.) Over the years he has contributed many times to the Doctor Who books and audio series. He is the author of a beloved cat memoir: *The Story of Fester Cat* (Berkley.) He has taught Creative Writing at both the University of East Anglia and Manchester Metropolitan University, and now writes full time.

His blog is at: http://www.lifeonmagrs.blogspot.co.uk/ and he can be found on Twitter and Facebook.

JENNY COLGAN is a British writer of romantic comedy fiction, Sci-Fi and also writes for the *Doctor Who* line of novels and short stories. She writes under her own name and using the pseudonyms Jane Beaton and J. T. Colgan. In 2000, she published her first novel, the romantic comedy *Amanda's Wedding*. In 2013 her novel *Welcome to Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop of Dreams* won the Romantic Novel of the Year Award by the Romantic Novelists' Association. In July 2012 her Doctor Who tie-in novel *Dark Horizons* was published under the name J. T. Colgan.

PAUL DRISCOLL is a director of a large social housing provider in Greater Manchester and runs his own proof-reading company *Mined The Gap* (http://minedthegap.weebly.com). Recently he has established an online merchandise shop specialising in *Doctor Who* related goodies (http://doctorwhosales.weebly.com). He also works as an occasional songwriter and a writer/researcher across such diverse subjects as Social Policy, Philosophy and Cult TV. He has written of his love for the show in various fan projects including four essays published in the *You and Who* series of books. Paul is a regular contributor to the online fan site DoctorWhoWorldwide.com

MATTHEW SWEET is an English writer, journalist, and BBC broadcaster. He holds a doctorate from Oxford University on the sensation fiction of the 19th century, Wilkie Collins in particular. He was among the contributors to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* and was both film and television critic for the Independent on Sunday. His book, *Shepperton Babylon: The Lost Worlds of British Cinema* (2005) is a history of the British film business from the silent days, and includes interviews with surviving figures from the period.

He is also an author of TV films and series, including *Shepperton Babylon* (documentary, adapted from the book*, Silent Britain*, Checking into History, British Film Forever, The Rules of Film Noir and A Brief History of Fun, as well as several Doctor Who audio plays and short stories. He is also the presenter of a BBC Radio 4 programme, *The Philosopher's Arms*, a show recorded in front of a live audience, exploring classic philosophical issues and is a regular presenter of Night Waves on BBC Radio 3.

LANCE PARKIN is an author of many Doctor Who including novels *Cold Fusion*, *The Dying Days*, *The Infinity Doctors* and *The Gallifrey Chronicles*. He also writes non-fiction, including guides to *Star Trek,* Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, *Alias* as well as the incredible *Doctor Who* universe chronology *AHistory*. He has written many *Doctor Who* audio plays for Big Finish and wrote the critically acclaimed biography of the writer Alan Moore, *The Extraordinary Worlds Of Alan Moore* (2013, Aurum Press) as well as https://lanceparkin.wordpress.com/

CAROLYN EDWARDS is a freelance artist, based in the UK. She has been working professionally since 2000 and is a regular exhibitor at Doctor Who and Memorabilia/Comic Conventions all over the UK, selling original paintings, prints, sketch cards and greetings cards. Her work has also featured in Fanzines, books, theatre posters and magazines. Carolyn is kept very busy working on commissions, sketch card sets and other projects. Her artworks are in private collections all over the world. She would very much like to steal a TARDIS, as "There are never enough hours in the day!" You can buy her original artwork and prints here: http://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/SpiritedPortraits or keep up to date with Carolyn's new artwork, projects and shows: www.facebook.com/SpiritedPortraits and www.carolynedwards.blogspot.co.uk

GARY RUSSELL. After a ten-year career as a young actor, Gary moved into other aspects of the industry, working as a runner/assistant irector/AFM, as well as spending a period of time in press and publicity and brand management for the BBC. As a freelance writer he has written for a number of national magazines and periodicals such as *Radio Times*, *Mojo* and *Time Out*. For Marvel UK he served as an Editor and then Group Editor in both magazine and comic book departments, before moving on to work for gaming magazines and TV Soap magazines. Gary helped establish Big Finish Productions Ltd, for which he was the Executive Producer, overseeing all audio drama and book publishing programming; script-editing, producing and directing over 200 hours of original audio drama. He rejoined the BBC as a Script Editor at BBC Wales Drama, where he stayed for nearly 6 years, working on *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures* and *Wizards vs Aliens*. For BBC Wales he also produced and directed a number of *Doctor Who* animation and game projects before relocating to New South Wales, Australia, to be the Executive Producer on a new 26-part ABC Kids childrens' animated series, from Planet 55 Studios, called *Prisoner Zero.*

When in the UK, he lives in Cardiff. When in Australia he lives in Avoca Beach. He collects books, comics, action figures, Converse hitops, a ridiculous amount of CDs and DVDs and therefore, curiously, a lot of dust. He is allergic to onion and terrified of cows. Heaven knows why…

JON ARNOLD is the co-editor of *Shooty Dog Thing*: *2th and Claw*. His work has appeared in books including *Shooty Dog Thing, Outside In, Time Unincorporated*, the *You and Who* series, *Shelf Life, The Twelve Doctors of Christmas, Terrors of the Theatre Diabolique* as well as in innumerable fanzines and on websites such as *The Two Unfortunates* and *Winterwind*. He is currently working on several projects including his proofreading business, stories for horror anthologies and essays for the forthcoming *Hating To Love* . He tweets as @The_Arn and blogs at http://equilateral-chainsaw.blogspot.co.uk/.

JOHN PEEL was born in Nottingham, but moved to the US in 1981. He has written ten *Doctor Who* books, along with novels based on shows like *Quantum Leap*, *Star Trek* and *The Outer Limits*. His original series include *Diadem* and *Dragonhome*. He can be found at www.john-peel.com or www.Facebook.com/JohnPeelAuthor

SAMI KELSH is a Canadian writer, photographer, and illustrator. She has written for numerous television news sites, and is a regular contributor to *Cultbox*. Her visual works have been exhibited at galleries in North America and the UK. Her photographic project, *People of Who*, is a series of portraits celebrating the individuals responsible for helping to create the Doctor Who universe. She lives in Oxford. http://www.samikelsh.com

GEORGE MANN is the author of the bestselling *Doctor Who: Engines of War*, featuring the War Doctor and Cinder. His other novels include the Victorian fantasy series *Newbury & Hobbes*, beginning with *The Affinity Bridge*, as well as *Ghosts of Manhattan*, *Sherlock Holmes: The Spirit Box*, and numerous others. If he had a real TARDIS he would go back in time and ensure he could hit all of his impending deadlines. https://georgemann.wordpress.com

ELLIOT THORPE is a freelance writer, having previously worked with the sites *Den of Geek*, *Shadowlocked* and *Doctor Who TV* as well as for *Encore*, the magazine for the theatre professional, and the Dean Martin Association. He was commissioned by Big Finish Productions to script *Doctor Who - Cryptobiosis*, starring Colin Baker and Nicola Bryant and works with the West End stage production *The Definitive Rat Pack* (www.thedefinitiveratpack.com). Elliot's first novel 'Cold Runs the Blood' was released in 2013 and is available in paperback and as an ebook. He is currently working on a second novel as well as a biography of Dean Martin. Twitter: @elliot1701 Website: www.coldrunstheblood.wix.com/elliot-thorpe-author

ALAN P JACK has been a Doctor Who fan since 1979. This is his first attempt at writing fiction. Having worked in Healthcare for many years, he is looking at entering the amateur world of Stand Up Comedy. As well as being active in the geek community and appearing on the community radio station Phonic FM, he enjoys keeping dogs and rats and collecting vacuum cleaners.

ELTON TOWNEND JONES is a critically-acclaimed playwright, director, actor and theatre producer with a number of West End runs under his belt. He is best known internationally for the works: *Dalloway*, *The Unremarkable Death of Marilyn Monroe*, and *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*. He is a founding member of Dyad Productions and also

writes professionally about film, music and television. He has been watching *Doctor Who* since 1972 and hopes you get the 'Mirrorlon' joke.

NICK MELLISH has written articles for Doctor Who fanzines such as *Whotopia*, *The Terrible Zodin* and *Shooty Dog Thing*, contributed to books such as *You and Who: Contact Has Been Made*, *Outside In* and *Celebrate Regenerate*, co-written a book reviewing the Eighth Doctor's audio plays from Big Finish (*Memoirs of an Edwardian Adventurer* with Will Brooks), and had a story in *The Casebook of the Manleigh Halt Irregulars* from Obverse Books. He keeps a blog at http://tinternetmellish.blogspot.com, and works with pre-school children.

MATTHEW SYLVESTER was formerly Features Editor, Technical Consultant and regular columnist for four of the leading martial arts magazines in the United Kingdom. He is also the author of the critically acclaimed *Practical Taekwondo: Back to the Roots*, which has been sold around the world. Matthew has had a number of short stories published by Fringe Works, KnightWatch Press, Anderfam Press and Emby Press.

DAVID CARRINGTON is a new writer. He written for several comedy shows and has been developing scripts for radio and TV, including a modern re-telling of the *Dreyfus Affair*. A frequent contributor to radio comedy programmes on the BBC, he is also a prolific and talented screenwriter and is currently developing several projects for TV and film. David lives in Essex and can be found on Twitter @dw_carrington.

BARNABY EATON-JONES is a freelance writer of books, poetry, scripts and documentaries. He is also an actor, improviser and musician. His stage scripts have won the odd award, written exclusively for The OFFSTAGE Theatre Group, and his poetry has appeared in many published anthologies. His documentaries have been shown around the world and released on DVD, covering many subjects in history, in literature and on film. His most recent work includes the publication of his comedy novel, *Lemon*, an adaptation of a play he wrote for BBC Radio called *Running To Stand Still* - which was released on CD for the charity Invest In M.E. (being a sufferer of the condition they research into) - and adapting and recording an audio version of *Single White Who Fan: The Life & Times Of Jackie Jenkins* for What Noise Productions. He is currently compiling two anthologies for CoppaFeel! and Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research, as well as setting up his own publishing company ('Chin Beard Books'). His website is www.barnabyeatonjones.com

CHRISTOPHER BRYANT has been writing professionally for almost fifteen years and has been a Doctor Who fan for more than twice as long. He was a regular contributor to long-running satirical comedy revues *NewsRevue* (London) and *The Treason Show* (Brighton) between 2001 and 2008 and has also written and adapted several plays for youth theatre shows. More recently, he co-edited *You And Who: Contact Has Been Made* (a collection of personal essays covering the entire of televised *Doctor Who*) which is currently being reissued as a bumper volume with additional material to raise money for Children In Need. He has also contributed to *Blake's Heaven,* the forthcoming collection of *Blake's Seven* writing edited by John Davies. He writes regular features for *Celestial Toyroom*, the magazine of the *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society. Away from writing, Christopher is a full-

time English teacher. He is married to Nina and has a daughter called Cariad.

MATT FITTON writes scripts, prose and anything else you'd like him to. Since 2010 he has worked for Big Finish Productions on the *Doctor Who* range of full-cast audio dramas and spin-offs. He also script edits and writes for their acclaimed audio series based on Terry Nation's *Survivors*, and, coming later in 2015, *The Omega Factor*. He lives in Oxford with his wife and son and has an infrequently updated blog at www.mattfitton.co.uk

Selected recent credits:
Survivors: Revelation (June 2014)
Doctor Who: Dark Eyes 3 (November 2014)
Doctor Who: Equilibrium (February 2015)

ALAN RONALD is a life-long Doctor Who fan, Scottish writer, director and comedian residing in Hertfordshire. His movie credits include *Jesus Versus The Messiah*, and segments of the *Death Tales* horror anthologies, amongst others. He currently hosts and performs at regular comedy nights in Watford, and also works as a pro-wrestling cameraman.

PAUL HANLEY is an artist, animator and writer based out of Austin, Texas. Over the years he's done licensed art for Godzilla, Judge Dredd and Firefly One of his handful of official Doctor Who jobs to date was the design for the War Doctor's companion, Cinder. He's also a designated portrait artist for the spinoff character 'Ms. Iris Wildthyme' in her various media excursions."

PAUL GRIFFIN's previous work has appeared in DWM and he illustrated the first BBC book in 1997 with The Devil Goblins From Neptune. After resting for 17 years he now regularly illustrates for the Cygnus Alpha Fanzine and various books, alongside presenting the electronic music radio show Two Knobs and an Oscillator.

He will happily accept private commissions and professional work, and you can contact him on pldgriff68@hotmail.com

All uncredited stories are written by Declan May
except
'The Girl with the Purple Hair Parts 1-3' which was written by
Declan May and John Davies

Thank you for your donation.

About the charity

Caudwell Children

Caudwell Children provide family support services, equipment, treatment and therapies for disabled children and their families across the UK. They also run an Enable Sport programme for talented disabled athletes and Destination Dreams which provides holidays for children fighting life threatening conditions.

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- Treatment Services which provide access to treatments which may not be available in the UK.
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- STEP Programme which provides life changing individual therapy programmes, development and rehabilitation programmes for children with brain injuries also parent/carer training to ensure the effects of the therapy and treatment programmes are maximised.
- ACT provides a programme of innovative therapies, education, dietary and nutritional intervention aimed at unlocking the lives of children with Autism also parent/carer training to ensure the effects of treatment and therapy programmes are maximised.
- Enable Sport Provides specialised disability sports equipment to enable disabled children to participate in competitive sport.
- Destination Dreams offers a fully supported group holiday to Florida providing precious memories for terminally ill children and their families. Caudwell is the only charity funding the whole family including carers and providing a team of paediatric physicians and volunteers to ensure all the needs of the family are met.

To learn more: www.caudwellchildren.co.uk

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Acknowledgements

DECLAN MAY WOULD like to thank and mention some people who, in one way or another (and sometimes without realising it!) have helped and inspired me whilst putting this book – and its subsidiary projects – together.

TIMO PEACH
ANDY ROBINSON
PAUL MAGRS
GEORGE MANN
NICHOLAS BRIGGS
MATT FITTON
ANDREW SMITH
KATE ORMAN
GARY RUSSELL
RUSSELL T DAVIES
JIM MORTIMORE
STEVEN MOFFAT
JOHN PEEL
JENNY COLGAN
LANCE PARKIN
PAUL SPRAGG
INGRID OLIVER
CAROLYN EDWARDS
PAUL GRIFFIN
PAUL HANLEY
LEE RAWLINGS
DAN BARRATT
(THE REAL) JENNY SHIRT
STEVEN SHAPANSKY
MATT BARBER
ELLIOT THORPE
JON ARNOLD
PAUL DRISCOLL
STÉPHANE 'CHARB' CHARBONNIER
DAVID CARRINGTON
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS
J.R. SOUTHALL
ALAN MOORE
KINGSLEY AMIS
FRANK ZAPPA
BBC RADIO 3

SPECIAL BIG THANKS TO:

JOHN DAVIES - For his creativity, advice, friendship and dedication.

ANDY ROBINSON – For going far beyond the call of duty and making the most incredible film and for being a wonderful, inspirational person.

TIMO PEACH – For writing, performing and recording the music for the film, for his elegance, class, humour and friendship.

BARNABY EATON JONES – For support, advice, imagination, enthusiasm and for agreeing to publish this book.

WARREN FREY – For his editing skills, suggestions, humour and knowing what to cut, And for teaching me how to 'shotgun a beer'…

SIMON BRETT – For his awe-inspiring dedication, months of incredibly hard work, his beautiful artwork, his friendship & support, his weapons-grade comic-book skills and knowledge and his beautiful prose

NICHOLAS HOLLANDS – for making this book what it is, for letting us draw on his overwhelming talents (editorially, visually, graphically, creatively), for his humour, friendship and support.

To my wife RACHEL MAY for supporting me all the way and for putting up with my constant stream of babble about my 'Doctor Who' book. I love you so much.

To ZACHARY OSCAR MAY: One day you'll be able to read this. I love you. Daddy's finished with the computer now…

To CAUDWELL CHILDREN. Your support for children with disabilities, their family and carers is beyond compare. You have helped us, helped our son Zachary, by providing material and equipment that has, in many ways, enriched both his life and ours. Thank you.

WARREN FREY WOULD LIKE TO THANK:

J.M. Frey, Jake Simpson, and Steven Schapansky

SIMON BRETT WOULD LIKE TO THANK:

Andrea: for your neverending love and support in the face of obsession and unpaid work.

Lee: for the brotherhood, the energy and the path through the chaos

Declan: for your utter belief in my abilities and the ones I didn't know I had.

Timo: for being, quite possibly, the embodiment of gentlemanly dudeness

John Davies: for being the perfect writing partner/friend (Translates as: makes me look good)

Jim Mortimore: for your generosity and words

Plus Big Love to: Caitlin, Freya, Amelia, Mum, Mandy, Rachel, Ian, Paul "Griffalo" Griffin, Alan "Personality" Jack, Northern Paulie and Jenny "Favourite" Shirt.

NICHOLAS HOLLANDS would like to thank Declan for the brilliant opportunity and his long-suffering husband for putting up with him.

Seasons of War Film Credits

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ANDY ROBINSON

PRODUCED BY TOM HUTCHINGS & TOM MENARY

1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR..... LUCY TOWNSEND

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ..... ANDY ROBINSON

MUSIC..... MOMO:TEMPO

EDITING ..... ANDY ROBINSON

PROPS DESIGN & PRODUCTION .....TOM HUTCHINGS & COLIN HUTCHINGS

COSTUME SUPERVISOR / WARDROBE..... SHEV AL-KAZRAJI

WARDROBE ASSISTANT ..... AMELIA DIDDS BEAVER

WAR DOCTOR SKETCHES ..... CAROLYN EDWARDS

MAKE UP ..... SIMON TYTHERLEIGH

ON-SET STILL PHOTOGRAPHERS..... TIM HUTCHINGS & RICK STEAR

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS..... EVIE OLD, EMILY MCELHINNEY, JACK STEVENS, ASH HOOPER

BACKGROUND ARTISTS CO-ORDINATOR ..... LEE RAWLINGS

SEASONS OF WAR CONCEPT & ANTHOLOGY EDITOR..... DECLAN MAY

SEASONS OF WAR CREATIVE DIRECTOR ..... SIMON BRETT

KEY CAST

THE WAR DOCTOR ..... TOM MENARY

THE ARTIST GIRL ..... DAISY BATCHELOR

THE ARTIST WOMAN / NARRATOR ..... BECKY RICH

THE CORSAIR ..... TOM HUTCHINGS

GALLIFREYAN MEDIC ..... SAM PIKE

WOUNDED WARISIAN SOLDIER ..... GEORGINA BURFORD

WARISIAN VOLUNTEER ..... CANDICE OWENS

OLD WAR DOCTOR (HAND SHOTS) ..... SIMON TYTHERLEIGH

BACKGROUND ARTISTS

(WARISIAN VICTORY PARADE SCENE)

MOLLY BATCHELOR

CHASE PAYNE

DAVID PHILIPS

CORREY EDGAR-GUY

MARK LINDSEY EARRLEY

PHIL SCOTT

DAN BARRATT

JODIE NEWTON

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ALAN P JACK

ANN MADDERN

BERNARD BURGESS

JOLYON TUCK

JOHN INGHAM

THANKS TO:

LUCY & INDIA ROBINSON

TOBIT EMMENS

ROBIN WHENARY

DIANA TOWNSEND

ALEX WHITE

LUCY COLE

BEN TALLAMY

SHANE RHODES and DALEK CANDI

MICHELE BATCHELOR

EXETER COLLEGE

ALI PYM & JONAS HAWKINS AT EXETER PHOENIX DIGITAL

KEITH WEEDON & POLTIMORE HOUSE